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# LECTURES

ON THE

## FOLLOWING SUBJECTS,

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| <p>I. Introductory Lecture.</p> <p>II. On Consideration and Social Conversation.</p> <p>III. On pure and false Religion.</p> <p>IV. Containing a Proposal to unite all true Protestants in one Principle, and form a Society of United Protestants in order to vanquish Popery.</p> | <p>V. An Endeavour to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace.</p> <p>VI. Against Popery.</p> <p>VII. Ibid.</p> <p>VIII. Of Infallibility.</p> <p>IX. On Mortification.</p> <p>X. Ibid.</p> <p>XI. Of the Light within.</p> <p>XII. Of Spiritual Understanding.</p> <p>XIII. Of the Word of God.</p> |
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By the late Mr. PETER ANNET.

Corrected and revised by HIM just before his Death.

With the HEAD of the AUTHOR,

Curiously engraved, by his own Direction.

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THE  
Introductory Lecture.

*And into whatsoever House ye enter, first say,  
Peace be to this House. Luke, chap. x. ver. 5.*

GENTLEMEN,

WE are here met together to converse freely with each other, and by this free conversation and reasoning to find out truth. This is a lovely motive, and should therefore, however we may differ in our opinions, be a means to promote respect and affection for each other; I am sure this must be the consequence if what I have mentioned be the motive, for Truth is not found but by pure and unbiased Reason, and Reason is that spirit or peace-making nature which subdues all unjust, and moderates all violent passions, teaching us to have a regard for others, as well as for ourselves: it is therefore of the utmost service for the government of mankind, and to promote social tranquility; for which cause all our

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thoughts, words and actions should be directed by it. It should direct our thoughts to judge what is fit for our belief and practice ; for belief or faith is of no other consequence than as it tends to promote some good ; therefore, that faith is of none, that is no way reducible to practice. But if such kind of speculations delight our minds, as are injurious to none, they are of some service to give us delight. These, though mere speculations, every man has as much right to enjoy, as his own worldly property ; for these are in a peculiar manner his own, as being the goods of the mind, for the mind thinks them good, and divulging them, a kind of commercial traffic. To injure a man for maintaining his opinions, who has no intention to injure others, is committing violence on him with an endeavour to rob him of his freedom. If we have better mental goods, and can persuade him to change, well and good ; there is no harm done, and if it tend to make him more happy in himself, enlarge his mind, and improve his reason, make him a wiser and better man, and more useful to society : it is then lawful, nay, laudable in such case to make the attempt in a mild, persuasive and reasonable

reasonable way ; for the mind abhors all acts of violence, and therefore cannot love even truths that are roughly introduced. The manner of their introduction should be reasonable as well as the truths themselves. If a friend forces his way into my apartment with violence, against my consent, it renders his company unacceptable at that time, and to be worse thought of at all times after.

Men are judged of men by their actions, and by their sentiments of actions, so far as they can be known. Actions make the dispositions appear ; every man only knows his own heart; men can only judge of men as they do of all things else, by appearances ; but in these they may be deceived, and therefore should be careful, and not rigidly censorious one of another. Let men differ about speculations, but not disturb the peace of society. There are knaves and honest men of all parties. As honesty or knavery appears, men are to be regarded or guarded against ; their mere speculations are of no concern but to themselves. The good-natured honest man is always an acceptable companion, whatever speculative sentiments he embraces. This honest man has always a

love for truth, though he may not always perceive it; he seeks for it, though he may not always find it. If we consider that the intrinsic nature of things is known to no man, but the appearances of things to our senses is the rule of our understanding, it is enough to prevent us from being too positive in our judgments, at least not to prefer the lesser good of speculative truths, to the greater good of practical truth or virtue. And considering the real uncertainty of all things, as to our absolute knowledge of them, we should so preserve a love to truth, as never to let go our love to virtue; so to preserve a love to truth, as to be always ready to receive it upon conviction, but never without, which will testify honesty of heart, and at the same time preserve us from being deceived by falsehood and imposture: it will keep prejudice and bigotry from us, the occasion of many evils, nor suffer us to injure the friends of truth and honesty; it will teach us to labour to prove the truth of what we would have received as such, and not desire any to receive it without proof sufficient for his conviction. For by mens being required to do otherwise, it is that mankind are led into and remain in errors of evil consequences, and become dupes to imposture.

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If speculative opinions are more or less valuable as they are more or less useful to peace and sociability, those are most worthy our recommendation and regard, which best tend to promote a friendly disposition.

If men are deceived in believing a doctrine which is of no bad consequence, it is a matter of indifference, and as such it should be received and regarded. We don't know absolutely that we have right notions of any thing, only such seem to be most right which are most fit for us: we judge only by appearances, such as our senses form, which are different in different bodies, and our reason cannot conduct us contrary to sense: therefore that appearance of things which best agrees with every one's experience, is his best guide in judgment and action, if it conduce to the main point, man's peace and mutual happiness: for the affections and dispositions of men are according to their natural frame and constitutions, and become active by motives. Yet many a disposition may be cultivated and improved, many an affection increased or lessened, by indulging or not indulging it, by receiving or rejecting

rejecting rational lessons ; and actions are always correspondent to the affections and motives that produce them. The nature of the mind, like that of the earth, submits to culture ; nature is so improved by art, and art is so much the production of nature, that it is not possible to separate them. And as we do many necessary things freely, we are necessarily free to do many things ; therefore the difference between the one and the other is such, as ought to make no difference between our communion and union. It is prudence and virtue not to give offence to the injuring of ourselves or others, unless it have a prospect of producing a greater good, and to take care not to gratify a humour at the expence of virtue, but in all things, conform to the cool conduct of reason, and seek the preservation and promotion of the peaceful and sociable spirit.

If education or custom is to direct our conceptions and belief, it sets aside the use of reason ; but if we desert those leaders, then are we free to exert the powers of the soul, which if not exerted, are given us in vain. But if exercised, we may hope at last to anchor in  
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the harbour of truth. If our minds covet knowledge, and labour to acquire wisdom, that valuable, that great, that glorious acquisition, we may obtain, if we cast off all the impediments of pusillanimity, prejudice, and partiality to pre-conceived opinions. If affairs of consequence are the subject of our enquiry, why should our search be hindered? why not encouraged? if of no consequence, but for re-creation and the exercise of our abilities, why should it be forbidden, why prevented, seeing it is harmless? and harmless recreations ought always to be indulged, that the mind at times may be relaxed from the cares of life. The door then being open, and the passage clear, let us enter in, and in our contentions for truth, let us also contend to maintain peace in this society; then we shall not only say as a compliment, *Peace be to this house*, but do the things that make for peace, and wherewith one may edify another; and may a peaceable and benevolent spirit enter and remain among us.

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## *On Consideration and Social Conversation.*

*Let us consider for our-selves, and then  
Converse, and reason, like discerning men.*

**T**O this end we meet, that we may consider, and judge of subjects presented to our enquiry, according to our abilities; which should be employed without prejudice and partiality. This is virtue—Every virtue is known by this rule; it conduces to the happiness of ourselves and others. All virtues are of a social nature; they, like the sun, display their kind influence for human benefit; therefore lovers of virtue are lovers of men. The good spirit circulates among a body of good men in civil society, as blood in the veins of a natural body. Every good man wills good to all men, even where he cannot do it, and does it where he can. He rejoices at the prosperity of the good, and endeavours the amendment of the bad; and the information of the ignorant.

Consideration in quest of truth is the path of wisdom, in which path philosophers only travel.  
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They withdraw from society to contemplate, that they may return to it better qualified for the service of it. The moral end of social enquiry is the improvement of science, and the information of the judgment, for rightly conducting ourselves and our affairs. This contributes to social benefit. To pursue truth and practice it, includes man's whole duty, both in private and public life.

If we consider the ways of men, we shall find that men unacquainted with each other, are jealous and fearful; and fear breeds dislike and hatred. This uncultivated state of nature is a state of war. Men are oft deceitful in seeking their own advantage, and the designs of men being secret in their own minds, they are not well to be trusted before they are well known: but in society men become acquainted, and better knowing each other, the harmonious spirit of sociability kindles kind thoughts in each others breasts; and in collecting acquaintance, men naturally believe and hope the best, which make jealousies and fears subside: hence comes credit, confidence and mutual assistance. This state of nature is a state of peace; and this is

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that state which is desirable, and worthy our endeavours to promote and cultivate.

Men that love society for the sake of conversation and improvement of their minds and manners, will have an advantage to select out of many, those who are most agreeably disposed to contribute to this end ; and separate, for their more familiar company and conversation, such as are most agreeable to their dispositions. Vulgar discourse and breeding best suits with vulgar minds : they are no more polite in their choice, than in their understandings : but these are no company to men of nice taste and discernment. The crude and indigested thoughts of the inconsiderate vulgar, whether rich or poor, noble or ignoble (for men are not wise because they are rich or great) whom the common cry and custom carry away, are distasteful and nauseous to men of sense, discernment, and careful conduct : Like things attract each other : In correspondent qualities there is harmony. Hence it appears that intelligent natures as well as unintelligent, have their attraction and repulsion, or something like them ; and that nature governs all her works by the same laws, which only change as the substances and their

their circumstances change. An enquirer after wisdom hates the impertinence of fools, and repels them and separates himself from them, at least, chuses not such for his conversation ; but draws to him, the conversation of wise men, when he finds them, or he is drawn to them. Good men also avoid bad company, and love to associate themselves with good men. Men delight to herd with those of their own kind.

Tho' thinking and judging for ourselves is our natural right, maintained by the wise and honest in all ages, most *divines* esteem it the parent of heresy, because it leads men to eradicate irrational credulity, on which craft their wealth and power depends; though on this principle stand, the reformation in the church, and revolution in the state, from spiritual and civil bondage.

Churchship is connected by agreement, in unexamined opinions and ceremonies; our society by examining opinions without ceremony, to promote liberty and truth, which stand or fall together. Such who think those are right, will naturally think these are wrong, not considering that those are the productions

of art, these of nature. They are composed of bondmen, these of freemen. They are the children of darkness, these of light. The more ignorant men are, the greater dependence they place on their guides, and the more easily they submit to their guidance, and yield to them riches and dominion.

The guides of the multitude lead them by traditional creeds, enthusiastic notions, and senseless superstitions; but the knowledge and virtue beaming from nature, are man's glory: Whereas reason is warpt to serve the interested opinions of men, and morals are formed subservient to their interest. But liberty and truth leave men to believe what they can, and to practice what they ought.

These divines are diviners, guessers, conjurers, dealers in supernatural mysteries and miracles. Though they can do no miracles, they assert many to have been already done\*, which serves their purpose as well. And they are a kind of fortune-tellers of things to come after death, which they know as much of as the wonders past, the truth

\* *The reader is here to understand, that the miracles of Christ and his Apostles are not questioned, but the reflection is on the use men make of them.*

truth of both which they equally assert, and their ignorance and assurance of both are equal: therefore their divinity is divination.

We profess to philosophize, not to divine. Our arguments ought to be fetched from the revelation of nature; not from supernatural revelation. It is not our business to soar out of sight. If men would build on nature more, and adhere more to reason, and lean less on authority, they would not be so stinted in their understandings, sitting down at their *ne plus ultra*. They would not always walk in go-carts, nor hang on their leading-strings, but they would become men in understanding.

The misled multitude, and their interested leaders, associate only to support their party, and to increase their interest. These, as much as their power permits, prevent men from enjoying their rightful and natural liberties; and injure, as much as in policy they can, the abettors and defenders of that darling freedom, which all wise men are fond of; and good men always indulge. These confederate to injure society, and oppress mankind; these consult their own benefit by the evils they bring on others,

others, and by their narrowness of self love, injure social felicity. But the pleasure that results from obeying the dictates of pure nature, in diffusing knowledge and doing good to mankind, is the purest of all pleasures. Those who never did the one, never knew the other. The love of wisdom is a love of a most divine nature, and is therefore the love of God in man: and obtaining wisdom, is a divine reward for the labour in seeking it. He who enjoys the tranquility that wisdom brings, has heaven within him. The world is generally a stranger to these spiritual delights; because it is a stranger to the knowledge of truth. Men seeking sensual pleasures and mammon, are unacquainted with wisdom and her rewards: they not caring to go out of the fashion in opinion (for there is a fashion in thinking as well as in dressing) are content to receive that for truth which custom calls so, and being slothful and dastardly, will neither consider for themselves, nor give encouragement to those that do. They that seek the kingdom of truth faintly and with pusillanimity, are those who seek to enter in, but are not able. The kingdom of Truth is the kingdom of God, into which the heavenly heroes only enter; for they are worthy.

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Those who cannot find satisfaction in the trash that is commonly put off for truth, think it necessary to consider for themselves, and recommend strict and cautious examination to others; for the more truly good things are, the more, by examining, their excellency will appear. There are among men some who only need to be rouzed out of their indolence, to employ their talents for the happiness of themselves and others: and there are those who are seeking truth with honest hearts, but are much bewildered by the deceits of men. Those wandering and bewildered minds should be excited and directed to exert their talents, to try, see, and taste for themselves; and be assured that when a man has done his endeavour, he has done his duty. None are enemies to the light of enquiry and understanding, but the dealers in fraud and deceit. *They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.* They take great care to work in darkness, to hide their fraud, and conceal their aversion to truth, and to throw a veil over their motives and intentions.

To enlarge narrow minds, and cultivate impartial truth, is the good aim of encouraging free

free debates. It is not for hire or reward. He that being avaricious would make his market of truth, would corrupt and adulterate it, if thereby he could raise his price. Whoever would make a trade of truth, or embrace it for gain, would trade in falsehood, and embrace error if he could get more by it; for his ultimate end is gain. Their gain is their godliness; for take away their gain, and their contention for propagating and promoting godliness ceases. Solomon advices to *buy the truth and sell it not*: That is, spare no labour, no cost, to obtain it; but when you are possest of it, do not prostitute it to lucrative views, and base mercenary interest.

To cultivate the mind, prevents vice, and promotes virtue. There is no mending the heart without the head; nor the head without consideration and reflection; which to stir up, Conversation is useful.—Minds, which if duly cultivated, might be the glory of the age; without culture, may become the disgrace and scandal of it. The garden of Paradice needed dressing and tilling. The finest vines, without the cultors care, run wild, and much of the precious juice that would become fruit, spends

spends itself in leaves and branches, and the fruit itself degenerates.

Enemies to reasonable liberty are lovers of slavery. Reasonable liberty is the exercise of our reason on whatever may come within the sphere of it. Those who are foes to freedom, are those whom selfish interest, prejudice, bigotry and ignorance have blinded. All who desire liberty for themselves, should give it to others, who would make no such bad use of it, as the spirit of popery makes, to crush all that do not herd with them; which use it ever made, whenever it had the power. Liberty is not to be granted to those who would destroy it, when possessed of power to do it. Good policy which seeks the good of mankind, forbids that liberty to these which tends to this end; for they are unworthy of receiving good, who make a bad use of it. There should be no wrath shewn against any on account of different sentiments; nor marking out the man; let men express their sentiments freely, and be freely answered. This is for the advantage of truth. They who cannot bear reasonable contradiction, are prejudiced. This narrow-soul disposition has been productive of a world of mischief: but maintaining

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the cause of human liberty, in all useful and commendable things, enlarges the good dispositions of men one towards another, and delivers them from many violent and unjust oppressions. Liberty therefore is certainly worth contending for, because life is not worth contending for without it. What is greater spiritual bondage, than not being permitted to think freely, and determine rationally; than not being allowed to direct ourselves by our sight, our senses, and our understandings, but by the arbitrary will and dictates of others, contrary to our better judgment?

Let us, who enjoy the happiness of judging for ourselves, soar upwards, and fly aloft in the open firmament of philosophy, whose wings of contemplation and enquiry are not clipt; in a land where men are not confined, like reptiles, to the low and groveling thoughts, which the enslavers of mankind bind and limit men to, whereby their minds being enslaved, they are easily deluded of their substance, when they have juggled and bugbear'd them out of the use of their understandings.

Those who justify evils done to men for the  
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pretended cause of God, whether they are in favour of the Jews against their neighbours, or of papists against protestants, or of protestants against any they call schismatics, heretics or infidels, have the same spirit in them all. God and Truth can maintain their own cause, without persecuting and destroying men for their sakes.

In these societies, it becomes us to hear; it is as necessary as to be heard; it becomes us to beware of entertaining a violent and heady temper, that uses railing instead of reasoning. Soft language will penetrate those pores of the mind (if I may so metaphorically speak) which passion and violence shut up and close. We look upon one as a friendly spirit, and entertain it as such; but on the other, as the spirit of an enemy, and so guard against it. A friend that comes like an enemy, is suspected as such, and as such, received. And it becomes us to put away prejudice in hearing, as well as wrath in speaking. The prejudiced ear puts the worst construction on what it hears; and rather than not find an error, will make one. An honest plainness and genteel ridicule may be used where all reasonable freedom is allowed, and the case admits of it; but the least shew of ill-

nature is disgraceful in a speaker. Ill language indeed justly raises indignation. It is not unjust to shew resentment to injustice; but a cool judgment is the best judge of right and wrong. Lastly, it becomes us to use as much prudence, persuasion, and gentleness, to undeceive men, as selfish artists make use of, to deceive; not that truth needs to be thus artfully dreft, but the humours of men love to be soothed; and they love it to that degree, that they had rather be soothed in their errors and vices, than be led to truth and virtue in a rugged manner. And truth like a beautiful genteel person, has an enchanting appearance in a becoming garb.

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### L E C T U R E III.

*Religion pure, is friendly, useful, plain,  
Religion false, injurious is, and vain.*

**R**EILIGION is much talked of, because the point what it rightly is, seems not to be settled among men who profess it, though it be easy to apprehend it by St. JAMES's description; which is, that *pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, for a man to visit*

*visit the widows and fatherless in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world ;* that is, Pure and undefiled religion, before the God and Father of men, is for men to avoid evil, and do no injury to each other, but all the benefits they can. This is not dressed up in allegory nor mystery ; but plain and easy to understand ; and when religion is thus plain, it cannot deceive ; it will be able to stand its ground, without a miraculous or supernatural aid. This is the practical part of religion, and which all its doctrinal parts ought to tend to promote.

True religion does good to men, for mens sake, as well as in obedience to God's commands ; but false religion does evil to men, for the pretended cause of God. It persecutes those that do not comply with its formalities. It will knock a man at head for trifles, for gathering a few sticks to make a fire on a Sunday. It teaches its votaries to borrow of men their substance, their gold, their jewels and apparel, without any design to restore them again. It sends men out to destroy mankind with fire and sword, and to possess their lands and substance, under a pretence of their being idolaters, or heretics. It requires men to forsake and hate

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their nearest and dearest relations for the holy cause of religion, and that a man should always be ready to defend the church with his life and fortune.

True religion gives men true notions of deity, but a false religion exhibits false notions of deity ; it teaches to worship many Gods, or a compound God, an incomprehensible jumble ; it confounds the nature of God and things ; it makes three Gods of one God, and one God of three Gods ; it makes God a man, and man a God ; it says God died, and yet asserts he is immortal ; it limits him to a body, and represents him infinite ; it tells us he is invisible and without form, yet that he may be seen in the shape of a man, a dove, a wafer or a cake ; that he is incorruptible, and yet eatable ; that he is immutably happy, and always angry ; that he is full of mercy, and full of wrath ; that he made all men to make them happy ; but he will make the far greater part of them everlastingly miserable.

False religion lays an injunction on men to believe nonsense, and absurdities, and contradictions ; and damns them to the pit of hell for not

not believing them. It persuades men, that after they have lived a most reprobate life, a few good words, and good wishes, will, with the consent of a priest, transport him into the mansions of the happy; that whatever is done to advance the power and grandeur of the church, is divinely good, though it be most diabolically evil; that mortifying and plaguing ourselves and one another, pleases God; that it is highly necessary to believe in mysteries and miracles, and to abandon sense, and reason, and humanity, when the church commands it, or when these would oppose her commands.

Innumerable are the notions and practices of men concerning religion. All of them so far as they deviate from reason, are either ridiculous or mischievous. And each party foolishly or wickedly damns all other parties, who do not believe or practice as the damning party does.

All false religions have their sanctuaries above reason, their mysteries, or rather absurdities, over which they draw a veil to exclude the judgment of reason. Enthusiasts soar out of its light; they say man's reason is not God's light; true, but it is man's, and the man who leaves it, has

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no light to conduct himself by. In all countries and cases where the light of reason does not shine out, they commit the most ridiculous actions, and the grossest evils.

Though the reason of man is not the reason of God as in him, it is such as is fit for man ; and so far as man sees the laws of God in the creatures, it conveys thereby the laws of God to the mind of man, and is God's light to man ; for by it we receive the laws of God from God, and read his word by that light he has afforded us, and fitted for our use.

To speak truly and plainly, there are but two kinds of religion in the world, one only is true, and the other kind is false. The false is popular, outward, sensual, formal, ceremonious, various, and artificial ; the other is unpopular, inward, spiritual, sincere, simple, plain and natural. The multitude of interested and unenquiring men embrace the former ; wise and good men the latter. The one is suited to cover vice and hypocrisy ; the other to extirpate them. The one is supported by force, the other by freedom. The one has the voice of mercenary imposers and credulous men ; the other is the choice

choice of rational men, the disinterested lovers of truth. The one religion dreads examination and discovery ; the other courts it ; for enquiry overthrows error but establishes truth. The lovers and adherents to the true religion, I call Rationists, the others Traditionists, because the foundation of the former is rationality, of the other is tradition.

We all know very well that the principal wisdom is, that of the practising kind. That wisdom without putting forth itself into action, is like a tree which bears nothing but leaves : A man, that from a true principle or disposition of heart, seeks right sentiments, does it for the sake of knowing and doing right. A well spent life is the greatest ornament of human nature, and gives the greatest satisfaction, both in life and death. The objections of good and wise men, against what tradition makes to be the rule of faith and manners, is against that which does not exhibit worthy ideas of God, or justifies the unworthy actions of men : when the rule of faith is not rational, and its examples not moral, it is enthusiasm or knavery, which leads to evil deeds, and vindicates them.

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They are to be detested by all men, who under pretence of serving God, destroy men, that lay claim to a command from God to do mischief, as Jacobism and Popery have both done, and therefore both to be abhorred. The good service of God cannot be drawn from bad notions of him. Men cannot serve God honourably, who conceive of him contemptibly. To compare him to ourselves, is making a man of him, which is mean ; but to ascribe to him the weakness and passions of men, represents him weak and contemptible. If the common people, that is, the generality of mankind, would but expunge such absurd notions of deity, and conceive of him but as of a man possessed of all moral rectitude (though such a nature is only the rule of man's conduct) their religion so founded would do no mischief, for such a nature is a display of the God in man, or of his laws to man ; it is the righteous nature he ought to endeavour to conform himself to, which is fit to guide him to his duty in all circumstances. If ignorant men, I say, only considered God as a perfectly wise and good man, and his laws as coming from such light, they would consider what wisdom and goodness was, and own they ought to be governed by it, and that all such government was God's, or the rule of

of his laws over us, such as they should endeavour to know and practice. This would be their reasonable service, righteousness, pure and uncorrupt.

If he that follows reason, is deceived in judgment, still following reason he will soon be undeceived; but some cautions are to be observed. Men should never go out of their depths; never renounce or condemn any principles, till they are sure they are absurd or false; never embrace any new one, without knowing it to be true; never assert positively any thing doubtful. To go on other mens bottoms, and affirm what they affirm, is to walk boldly in the dark. How wild and daring, as well as blind and ignorant, are mens affirmations about immaterial substance and supernatural notions, which they know nothing of. We do well when nature guides our reason, and a mind unprejudiced steers the helm. When we love truth sincerely, we shall be willing to part with the dearest notions we possess, as soon as they appear to be erroneous; and to part with that too, which we receive in its stead, when upon good grounds we are convinced of more sterling truth. Thus, *when the strong man keeps the house, his goods are in peace, till a stronger than he comes*

*and dispossesses him, taking away all his armour wherein he trusted.*

If one man's conscience is to injure another for conscience sake, it is a very bad one, and ought to be suppressed and ranked among the lusts of the flesh; but a tender, innocent conscience, ought to be indulged in small things, because it is an encouragement to preserve it good in great things; and a discouragement to virtue if not indulged. Conscience, when broke in upon, and set light by, leads to vicious practices without bounds. Men learn by little and little to do evil, till they become hardened to all evil that is in their power to do. Keep conscience tender while it is so, or by degrees it will grow as tough as stretching leather.

It is in vain to force people to be religious. Sabatharians, that prosecute people for what they call Sabbath-breaking, do not convert those they prosecute. When a beadle takes away a poor woman's whole stock of apples, nuts, and gingerbread, because she sells them on a Sunday, without which she cannot possibly get money enough to hold out the whole week from pinching want, does not shew the law to

to be good, nor make the woman more religious. If a poor barber be made to pay five shillings for shaving on a Sunday, when perhaps he does not get above ten shillings a week, it makes him never the better churchman. The law is not good that starves honest people. Severities in points of conscience are destructive to conscience. Nature and necessity cannot be controlled without manifest injury. When religion consists in superstitions, the enforcing them by pains or penalties renders that religion contemptible with many, and destroys true piety in those that enforce the observance of those superstitions, and teaches the sufferers to despise it. Whatever is not injurious to men, is not of an immoral nature, but are matters of indifference; all which should submit to necessity, be regulated with moderation, and limited only by decency.

Such are all external modes of religion, which all men should be permitted to use as they please, but none should be compelled. That sect which would reign over all, and compel all to use their mode, and have so exercised their power, forfeit their right to rule, as a tyrant forfeits his power who uses it to oppress.

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But as bad governors may be good servants; and many men may do good when their power to do evil is taken away, every mode of worship may be tolerated, that every one who pleads a tender conscience may be indulged in things indifferent; and but tolerated in such manner, that no one under pretence of conscience be enabled to do mischief to another. For though the law of nature indulge every appearance of good, under which no evil lies concealed; it forbids the granting of power to fools, madmen, or known villains to do mischief.

The Romish religion has no right to toleration; tolerating a religion which excites people to persecute, is tolerating wickedness under the cloke of religion.

Those who suffer in a good cause, to preserve a good conscience, expose, by their sufferings, to everlasting contempt, the cause; and those that oppressed and persecuted them, sufficient to make all good and reasonable men hate and detest all such persecutors.

Can protestants forget the burning rage of popery in the popish reign of queen Mary, and can

can they remember it, and tolerate popery? can they retain their senses, and think it ought to be tolerated by protestants? certainly not! Not to tolerate it, is an action tending to extirpate an evil, known by dreadful experience. It cannot be the work of goodness, but of folly, to indulge a sect or faction, whose works are evil, and whose leaders are the promoters of it.

Let us turn from hence, and consider our own happiness, that we may the better relish it. How easy are mankind imposed on, and how careful we ought to be to prevent the imposition, as much as may be in our power; though to do it absolutely is impossible, as may be seen by reflecting how few are capable to seek for and judge of truth among the gross of mankind, being by custom and education generally vitiated and corrupted, and of those who are by nature capable, how few have the means of improvement! how many of those who have the means, live such busy lives, that they are not capable to make use of them! and how many of those that have both capacity and leisure, are diverted from rightly applying their minds to form a true judgment of things, being called off by pleasures, or deterred by fears, that such

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application will tend to their injury in this world or the next. These being muh the greater part of the capable few, it must needs be that the multitude must be deceived, and cannot avoid being misled, while there are men in the world who have power, and find it their interest to mislead them. But how happy are those who seek truth and peace, and rest therein. May we enjoy this felicity, and may it ever be continued to us and to succeeding generations, to our offspring to come, to our and their lasting happiness and prosperity. Amen.

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#### LECTURE IV.

*A Lecture containing a Proposal to unite all true Protestants in one Principle, and form a Society of United Protestants in order to vanquish Popery.*

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IT is a complaint that is made by all who call themselves protestants, that popery prevails among us, and I believe not without foundation. I intended in this discourse to have shewn

\* If it was so ten years ago, when this was written, how much more must it be now, that Jesuits are banish'd out of all popish countries.

shewn the grounds of mens conversion to Rome, or the reasons why the ignorant are thus carried off; but when I had considered and drawn them up, I found they were too many to be mentioned in the time prescribed here to deliver my sentiments in; and that they are owing as much to ourselves, as to the industry of Popish priests, who compass sea and land to make proselytes: but because there are some of both preachers and people, of both the *right* and *wrong* reverend gentlemen, who are enemies to that foundation principle on which protestancy stands, namely, to the right of thinking and judging for ourselves, which is free-thinking, who are themselves the cause of the delusion of the people to popery, and yet either knavishly or stupidly impute it to free-thinkers: I shall propose a plan wherein it shall be experimentally shewn, if it take effect, that free-thinking protestants are the only persons who can confute popery; for reason only is capable of overthrowing it; and these only make use of their reason in religion, for nothing but reason can determine what is right or wrong. If it be not so, how can every man judge for himself? and why did Jesus say to the Jews, *Wherfore judge ye not in yourselves that which is right?* If men must be inspired to do this, with an inspiration above reason, who

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but crazy enthusiasts, pretend to have such an inspiring spirit? and when we make such an *ignis fatuus* our guide, who knows where the rushing of this mighty wind may drive us? and who knows not that this is essentially the very spirit of popery, that like a rapid torrent falling down a precipice, carries whatever it meets with, and is moveable along with it.

If man's reason may not judge what is right, what is there in man, that can do it? Why did Jesus upbraid the uninspired Jews for not judging in themselves what is right? If regardless of reason, we ought to follow any authority called spiritual; why not that of Rome as that of Geneva? why any one rather than any other? for if the rule or doctrine be above reason, reason can be no judge; why not then church which has been the repository of our authorities, without which those that pretend to inspiration would know and find nothing of it, their proof of it, being their own conceit and imagination; for assuming an inspiration above reason, they have no reason to prove it by; therefore they are obliged to condemn what they cannot stand the trial of; and does not the forsaking reason, or advancing faith above it, lead directly

directly into the bosom of the holy mother church of Rome?

As we read, All are not Israel, who are of Israel; so all are not protestants who are called so: They are not, who maintain popish doctrines with a popish spirit; they are not, whose faith can surmount mountains of absurdities; trampling down reason and virtue; who pretend to a greater infallible guide than what human nature can find; whose pride makes what they please to be God's, and makes him do as they please; these whose stupidity make him human in person, and cruel in nature, reconcile men to Rome, and drive the ignorant from his imagined wrath, to her pretended mercy.

These false protestants are incapable of being united in social union; for I do not propose to bring all that are called protestants into one society. I know that I may as well propose to unite the jarring elements, or still the stormy winds, and silence the roaring waves of the tempestuous sea. But to those protestants among all parties, for I willingly believe there are among all parties some, who are come to the use of their reason in religion, as in other

things, who are not bound by the fetters of any crazy or slavish authority above reason or below it; to these reasonable, these free-thinking protestants, are my words directed; for he that reasons must think freely and coolly: to unite these are my endeavours exerted, my hopes and expectations raised of the possibility of doing it, and probability of success. Into this class I do not put obstinate bigots, nor hot headed enthusiasts; for these are papists in spirit, and would be so in profession had they been so educated. They are not essentially and really true protestants, who do not maintain that it is **every man's** right and duty to judge for himself. It is on this uniting principle, and on no other, that a society can be formed to stop the progress, and subvert the power of popery in this nation; and every one who embraces this fundamental principle of protestancy, is a free-thinker. On no other foundation, can protestancy be defended. By whatever persons or means the name of a free-thinker has been brought into reproach; it is a scandal to those persons who have used means to that end. Every one who encourages this society by his conversation or presence, ought to be a free-thinker; that is, a free examiner of his own and other mens opinions; and not attempt to damn men into his

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own, but to encourage all free and fair examination.

A government that indulges free-thinking is an honourable government ; for it shews thereby that it has no mean design on the liberties of the people. It is said no nation in Europe encourages it more than this ; that none therefore is more free ; when it is discouraged and supprest, the iron sceptre will be extended, and slavery will come on. Destroy the banks that free-thinking has raised against ignorance, tyranny, superstition and enthusiasm, and the deluge of popery and arbitrary power will overflow us with a rapid torrent : the church will swallow up the earth, and the spiritual locusts will devour every green thing ; and the press will be supprest, which all tyrants and tyrannical priests wish for and endeavour.

I think it therefore necessary to exert our reason and encourage men to assert, maintain and defend this uniting protestant principle, that it is every man's right and duty to think and judge for himself, and to associate for that end. In other sentiments or opinions of truth, men may and must be allowed to differ ; but those who agree not to this, yield their necks to the yoke of

of popery, which is a yoke that neither we, nor our fathers were ever able to bear; a yoke by many degrees worse than circumcision, worse than all the ceremonies of the levitical priesthood; and it is the root of popery to deny men the right of judging for themselves.

On this uniting principle of private judgment, and reasonableness of toleration in religion, our reformation from popery and paganism, and true piety stands; and on this all right reformation always did and ever must stand, and on no other defensible principle; and all who consent not to this, are through ignorance or design favourers and friends to popery, slavery and arbitrary power in state and church, for with this principle, liberty, civil and sacred, stands or falls. I prefer the state to the church, because the church receives its power from the state, and is its servant.

To lay down our reason at the threshold of faith, is submitting to whatever doctrines the church imposes, which is popery; and to be obliged to disown one's judgment by an imposing and arbitrary authority, is to introduce hypocrisy, persecution, and every vice; for every vice is necessary to promote such authority.

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If our understandings are to be over-ruled by the pretended pious power of the church, by tradition, imposing priest, or slavish bigot of any kind, or by a text of scripture, which in the literal sense is absurd, and contrary to the common sense of mankind ; this is popery in kind ; for what more or less is the doctrine of transubstantiation, which was that accursed trial by which so many honest and innocent people were adjudged to death in Q. Mary's days, and the most cruel of all deaths, that of burning, and sometimes by a slow fire. Such are the tender mercies of that holy church, which we are now almost reconciled to, because we see no fires in Smithfield, no mitre now trampling on the sceptre, wresting the sword of justice from the magistrate, and barbarously murdering God's people for God's sake : No book of Martyrs are retained in churches as in former days. Popery is not now dreaded so much as free-thinking is, which shews the growth of popery, and the declension of protestancy ; because the craftsmen are more afraid of the force of reason than the power of popery, to shake their thrones, stalls and dominion over the laity, whom they can no longer keep in ignorance if reason prevails ; and all this inclines to popery, which in every shape is to be detested. But papists having

ing now no power to do mischief for the sake of religion, men are reconciled to the indulgence of popery, though the beast has the same nature now as ever, only her jaws are muffled. Their burning Jews every year at Lisbon, a people to whom they are obliged even for their God, and to them and the Pagans for their religion, shews what a godly spirit, and what religion they have.

To require people to take the sense of scripture on any church authority, not employing their own judgments to attain the right understanding of it, is to hood-wink the people, and enables any church to lead and govern their understandings as she pleases; and by pleading God's authority for assuming such power, men are brought into slavery.

It therefore appears to be useful, necessary and laudable, to form a society whose members may be protestants of any or of every kind, who agree in this one connecting principle, that it is all mens right and duty to judge for themselves, which is the only support of reason and virtue, in order to oppose and confute all the errors and vices of popery, answer all the arguments in its favour, and any objections that may

may be delivered in writing against those answers, giving them fair play, and killing popery by no force but that of reason.

This may be begun and carried on by one evening lecture in a week, of about half an hour long, in some hall or proper place hired for that purpose. The charges of rent, candles and other necessaries, to be paid by the contributions of subscribers: but I propose the lectures to be given gratis, agreeable to the command of Christ, *Freely ye have received, freely give*; which I shall be most ready to do, and not as an hireling, and subscribe also to promote, and whatever subscribing member besides, the society may chuse and appoint for coadjutors, if any prompted by the same disinterested spirit offer themselves for the work, or who, being thought worthy, may be prevailed on to join in carrying it on; for none are fitter to defend Liberty, than those who are in love with it; and I hope there are other men as well disposed as myself to encourage it both by their subscription and labour. The latter indeed may be convenient but to few, but if there are a sufficient number of the former, I have no doubt in me, that the latter will be wanting to vindicate the protestant principle, which I would have the

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society united by, from whence all true virtue proceeds; by which the justice of the reformation and revolution may be well defended, against all arbitrary power in state and church, which would lead us back again to the errors and impositions of the corrupt church of Rome, to the house of cruel bondage, to the terrors and tortures of an inquisition. Here again I set the church, before the state, because arbitrary power always first begins there.

And as the preachers of all professions now among us, seem rather to declare against the right of private judgment, for their own advantage, than to excite men to it; it appears to be therefore necessary, that we may not be reduced back again to that which is only paganism christened, and changed in name. This will certainly, or I am much mistaken, tend to the common good and interest of protestants, and preserve the allegiance of the king's subjects to his majesty's person and government, and to the protestant kings of this realm, which every convert to popery is made an enemy to, or alienated from, in such measure as is his zeal for popery.

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And to remove all timorousness and backwardness of well-disposed protestants to contribute to form this society, they are to understand, that there is no secret design hereby to set up any new sect of religion, nothing but lectures being proposed on the subjects before mentioned, without any forms or manner of worship, leaving every one at liberty to follow his own religious profession, or way of worship, at the church of England, or elsewhere, as his conscience, or interest, or custom directs.

There is an affotiating spirit in this nation for many good things, and why not for this? Men may be connected by one fundamental principle, on the support of which all their liberty and happiness depend; but in more articles, or those of another nature, men never did, will, or can agree. It is a kind of spiritual tyranny and imposition to require it, and a stupid or slavish spirit only that can acquiesce to bear the burden of what he knows not how soon he may be unable to endure: but this plan of union is to enjoy the freedom that truth gives, and the truth that freedom gives; and if the truth makes you free, then are you free indeed.

## LECTURE V.

EPHESIANS iv. 3.

*Endeavouring to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace.*

ALL external forms of worship, are matters of such indifference as oblige only the particular consciences of different practicers, for worshipping the father in spirit and truth, which is internal and not formal, is only essential. Outward forms are no where in the christian dispensation particularly prescribed, and commanded, therefore left to every one's will and pleasure; and consequently a good heart, a true and a right spirit, is acceptable in all forms, or in no form. I know there is a set of men, who will contend for the former, rather than the latter, though it be blended with all the superstitions of idolaters, who are and will be rather on the side of false gods, and false worship, than none at all; but the mind that is a blank is much fitter to receive the scripture of truth, than that which is written full of errors; for before truth can be there imprinted,

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the errors must be erased, which are too often impossible to be done, because the impression penetrates the very substance of the soul, and thoroughly tinctures all the passions.

If the external forms, rites and ceremonies of religion were essential to it, they would have been prescribed and commanded; but as they are not, they are things indifferent, and so acknowledged to be by many contenders for their use. And yet to support those indifferent things, what virtues have not been trampled on? what violences have not been committed? But if speculative principles are matters of indifference, and external modes of worship are their productions, they also must be deemed matters of indifference. Such as the tree is, such is the fruit: Spiritual worship cannot be confined to a certain mode or place: Therefore said Jesus to the Samaritan woman, *Ye shall neither in this mountain (of Samaria), nor yet in Jerusalem, worship the Father.* It shall not be confined to this place or that, that is, not to any; but *the time cometh*, it was always coming, as well as now is, *that the true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and truth*, in sincerity and purity, *for the Father seeketh such to worship him*; or chuses such worshippers.

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All the external modes of worship are what St. Paul calls, will-worship. But the will of man worketh not the righteousness of God. We may say of the different sorts of them, as St. Paul says of eating different sorts of meat, *Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not, judge him that eateth;* for God approves them both. Trifles make no difference in his regard, let them make none in ours; he says, *my son give me thy heart,* all other gifts are trifles with him. In giving him that, we give him our all, he accepts no less; and he wills us to please our childish fancies with childish things: like that of *esteeming one day better than another,* in the judgment of some, while others *esteem every day alike.* *Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.* And as it is of things *eatable, nothing is unclean of itself, but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean:* so it is with forms of worship; none of them are good or evil in themselves, but he that esteems them the one or the other, so it is to him; they are pure to him that thinks them pure, but they are evil to him that uses them by constraint. It is good therefore not to establish this, or that form, or any form, as the sole mode of true worship, or essential to it, but *the things that make for peace, and*

*and things whereby we may edify one another ; for there is no morality nor immorality in things whereby men are neither benefited nor injured, as in forms and ceremonies ; these are therefore indifferent things. It is mens faith or imagination rather that makes all indifferent things good or evil.*

And as it is with forms, so it is with all speculative, historical and traditional faith. The faith which makes not the head wiser, nor the heart better, is insignificant; but that sort of faith, which confounds reason, and makes the heart evil, which makes men utter bitter threatenings, condemnings and revilings on those that do not believe, is not a matter of indifference, though men pretend to it to maintain and support the cause of God: God's cause cannot be supported by sentiments that cannot support virtue.

But it may be objected, that in a society set up to encourage speculation and enquiry after truth, would you forbid men to speculate? or indulging them in it, would you forbid them to disclose their speculations? and will not differing opinions breed animosities? How then  
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can such a society have virtue for its basis and union ?

I answer, I would by no means forbid enquiry after truth, nor the divulging it. The one would be nipping virtue in its bud, the other would be preventing it from bearing fruit. It is a virtuous spirit that loves and seeks truth. It is nobility of mind to divulge and defend it : but let it be done in a virtuous manner. *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice, and be kind one to another and tender hearted.* I would have men learn to contradict with good nature, and with good nature bear contradiction. These are virtues worthy to be learned and practiced. This is the trial of virtue ; virtue without trial cannot be known ; but the more it is tried and known, the more resplendent it shines : It will happen that pride and wrath will not bear control ; and in such case it must needs be, that the society chuse rather to lose or amputate a member, when necessity requires it, than suffer the mortification of the whole body. Good laws are always useful to preserve the peace of society.

No speculations can be so essential as a virtuous conduct, the latter therefore must not be suffered

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ed to be broken thro' for the sake of the former. Truth is not only to be sought, but obeyed. It promotes virtue to bear contradictions with good nature, and to treat opponents with affability and friendship. It is a virtue that yields delight, to manage an argument in a gentle and friendly manner; and with mildness and decency, to bear opposition with patience; which will enable men to bear other disagreeable things. Thus internal and external peace will be preserved, to the comfort of a man's own mind, and of society. How can a lover of truth come to the knowledge of it, if he cannot bear to have his sentiments examined with candor? And how can a man expect his own should be treated friendly, who cannot candidly treat his brother's? This is highly necessary; for if men do not learn this, how can men of different principles be united by virtue? and of what consequence is virtue, if it will not produce such union among men? and if men are more zealous for things of less use and value than of greater, how does it display their wisdom or goodness? Truth is best supported by true conduct. If men are more zealous for speculations and ceremonies, than for a virtuous behaviour, how do they make virtue their essential point and aim? We should practice truth as well as love

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it ; otherwise we are like trees that bring forth leaves, but no fruit. He will have praise, and avoid many evils, who keeps his affections and passions subject to impartial reason. How can such a society as this succeed where freedom of sentiments are allowed, if opposition break the bonds of unity ? And how can it fail of success, if men aim at the knowledge of truth for the sake of preserving a good conscience ; for truth and virtue I love and admire, not formalities and fooleries, mysteries and nonsense, impositions and fancies called faith. I am an enemy to making these the essentials to promote happiness ; but I can bear with them, and with those that practice them, as things indifferent.

I think it necessary that every one who is acknowledged a member of this body, should from his heart subscribe with his hand to this one article : That any opinion called faith, which a man cannot have demonstrable evidence of, and all religious ceremonies are not of that value, moral virtue is, but are things indifferent : Because I conceive, that those who think them otherwise, will contend for them with a zeal that will destroy the peace of this society.

I am certain such a society must be pleasing to virtuous dispositions ; for my own part I own I want it greatly ; and will gladly do all that lies in my power to promote it ; tho' my power be but small, yet those of greater abilities may be hoped for, and to obtain such, if my proposal and labours be approved, I will shew you in after lectures how agreeable such a society must needs be to all good Christians ; so that it may give them no disgust.

As to forms or ceremonies of worship, I shall give you my opinion in the words of St. Paul, concerning celibacy and matrimony, in his epistle to the Corinthians, Chap. vii. I would that all men were even as I am, divorc'd from them all ; nevertheless, to avoid contention, let every man follow his own way or choice, for every one has his peculiar way of thinking and judging ; one after this manner, and another after that, as his education, or the manner he has made of his reason, has taught him. I say therefore to those that are wedded to ceremonies, let them so abide until otherwise convinced ; but to those that are not wedded to any, I need say little. Let not him that uses them, condemn those that do not ; and let him that uses them not, condemn those that do ; for God esteems them both alike ; therefore, whe-

ther he useth, or useth them not, he sinneth not; the ceremonies of any church are nothing but the commandments of men; therefore let every man abide in that calling, or way of worship, wherein he was called to liberty of thought and freedom of judgment, as best suits his condition and interest; but if unconfin'd in these, let him use his liberty rather. Art thou bound by these things to ceremonies, remain so; art thou loosed from them, seek not to be bound, being a churchman, or a Dissenter, or Quaker, or Jew, or Mahometan, care not for it; this is toleration. But this I say unto you, the time is coming, that those who use them be as tho' they used them not, for as these things come more into disrepute thro' knowledge of better things, so they will come into less use. If any man thinks he behaves negligently towards his church, let him more frequently attend it; but if she is become antiquated, withered and unlovely in his judgment, let him do what he will, keep to her or put her away, he sinneth not, Churchman or Quaker; let him keep to his own way. I shall conclude at this time with only adding, that the true worshippers, worship the Father in spirit and truth, for he regardeth only such worshippers. Virtue being a social spirit, must needs love the harmony of society. It is not of a monkish disposition; for virtue out of society has no existence.

## L E C T U R E VI.

*Against Popery.*

**T**O deny men the use of their reason in matters of religion, shews a disposition and intention to impose on their understandings, and deceive them: sophistical arguments have the same tendency; so is arguing on a false foundation, granted to be true; therefore understanding disputants grant nothing to be true, but what they know to be so, or cannot deny; they are so evident, that to deny the proposition would be to deny common sense and reason. To reason and judge aright, we should be sure to reason on right premises; that we be not embarrass'd with sophistry. Men are principally to beware of this, who argue with popish priests, or their bigots, for they deny to men the free use of their reason to judge for themselves, but as *they* direct their judgment. Thus mens reason that seems free, is byass'd and perverted, and by this perversion their craft gains ground; which all who have opposed, and exposed, have fell victims to their power, if they were able to exert it. If they could

could not be revenged on their persons, they have never failed to blacken and stab their characters; witness what they have written against Martin Luther.

The papists foolishly and maliciously report, that Luther, before he set up a reformer, had a conference with the devil; and supposing it true, tho' I do not grant it to be so, do not Matthew, Mark and Luke, say the same of Jesus Christ; for what end they reported this, I know not. I think the story gets him no honour, was it only written to shew us how well the devil is learned in the scriptures, and that both of them were able to fast forty days. If it had been well known that Luther and the devil had been seen together upon the pinnacle of St. Peter's at Rome, and had been forty days in private together before he set up for a reformer, what would not the Romish priests have said against him to support their church.

They say, Luther was guilty of a scandalous marriage with a Nun; none but the corrupted superstitious think marriage scandalous, unless it be in this one thing, that the church has procured a law to make those that are married live together, tho' such living together makes

makes them miserable, because the one hates or despises the other ; for marriage formerly did not oblige people to be joined together for better or worse during life.

The advising and obliging young women to be nuns, and young men to remain unmarried, is indeed scandalous, because it perverts the order and disposition of nature, which obliges all creatures to increase and multiply. It is a doctrine injurious to the felicity and posterity of mankind. Such doctrine ! in Timothy iv. 3. is called the doctrine of devils, and of seducing spirits, forbidding to marry, and to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received ; yet both these things the Romish church does, making these to be with her members acts of holiness ; but is not this abominable superstition, and denying men their natural liberties ? Does eating fish make a man more holy than eating flesh ? If it does, why do they not eat fish always. If it does not, why are people permitted to eat it at one time, and not at another ? Besides, it is contrary to the doctrine of Christ, who said, *not that which goes into the body defileth the man.* Thus the doctrine of Rome contradicts that of Jesus Christ.

As for Calvin, as he only threw off the ceremonies of Rome, but the cursed persecuting spirit remained in him, and he exercised it with the same cruelty ; this, and his doctrine of election and reprobation, shew him to have been a man of such bad principles and practices, that it brought scandal on the reformers. His reformation from superstitious worship might do some good ; but I cannot believe he was a good man, who acted the pope at Geneva. I give him up to his adversaries to damn him if they please ; burn him they cannot, tho' he deserved it for burning Servetus and others.

However, as God often, nay always, brings good out of evil ; Calvin helped to shake the power of Romish hierarchy that was grown excessive tyrannical, and most abominably wicked ; so that sins and pardons were set at a price.

The papists endeavour to scandalize protestancy, because it was begun in king Henry VIII. reign, on account of his not waiting an immoderate time for leave from the Pope to obtain a divorce ; and why should he have asked his leave ? Had he not power, as a king, to do what principally concerned himself, and related to his own happiness ? did holy King David ask the high

high priest whether he should marry those he liked, or divorce those he disliked? Did he not also take many concubines, and was he reproved for any, but for taking Bathsheba Uriah's wife, and murdering him? The papists say it was criminal for Luther to allow Philip, Landgrave of Hesse, to have two wives at once; had not the religious David, who was called a man after God's own heart, and Solomon, whom it is said the Lord loved, abundance of wives? Were Jacob, the patriarchs, and old testament saints, a parcel of notorious sinners for so doing? How came God to allow it then, and not now? Is it he, or priests that are whimsical and change his laws, not allowing at one time what, they say, he allowed at another?

However wicked Henry VIII. was, it is certain he lived and died a biggotted papist, and had no intention to introduce a reformation. He indeed delivered himself from the oppression of Rome's bishop, but not his people. He wrote in defence of popery, and was therefore styled by the pope, *Defender of the faith*; in which he lived in word and deed all his life long: for after abolishing the Papal power over himself, he executed the laws in defence of the Romish religion, and burnt several of his sub-

jects in support of it. Religion, which should have made him a tender and affectionate father to his subjects, made him a cruel tyrant over them: for however their sentiments agreed or disagreed from the king's, as it did not discharge them from their duty to him as their common father, had he proved such to them, neither ought it to have made him otherwise; yet such is the spirit of the popish religion, that it sets the parents against the children, the children against the parents; friends against friends; the king against his subjects; and the subjects against their king.

It had been matter of wonder, if at the reformation Rome's priests had given their assent to be disbanded with all their trumpery, and to deliver up what they had obtained by fraud and force. When did ever thieves give their consent to refund their ill-gotten wealth?

Have not the king and parliament, the great authority of the nation, a power to make priests, and a church? Surely if a church is made by law, it is a lawful church, though it may be a very bad one, as the church of Rome is. It is a legal church as it respects the law, though it may be a very illegal one, as it respects the natural

natural rights of mankind. It is a church of the state ; it is the production of power and policy, seldom of truth and virtue : but it is so much the less the church of Christ, by being established, if Christ's kingdom is not of this world : for then it becomes part of the kingdom of this world. But if Christ's kingdom be of the world now, though it was not at first, is it because the world is altered for the better, or because Christ's kingdom is altered for the worse ? it must be the latter, if this argument be applied to the iniquitous church of Rome. It is the church of mammon, and ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Ambition and covetousness laid the foundation of this church ; treachery and violence have carried it on. It is but ancient heathenism christened. By villainy it obtained its power ; and by villainy it has retained it. As it has encouraged kings to enslave the people for the sake of the church, so for the church's sake, it has encouraged rebellion against good princes ; for which cause it has always assumed a prerogative, and exercised a power to dispense with moral duties, whenever the discharge of them tended to injure its power or profit ; it has

sanctified rebellion, massacres, and all manner of cruelties.

The interest of this church is a separate interest from that of the people, therefore they herd together against them ; their interest depends on keeping them in subjection, therefore they tyrannize over them, and squeeze them. The wealth of the church depends upon cajoling the people out of their properties and effects, ingrossing their lands and estates ; therefore they are ever deluding, deceiving, pressing and oppressing them ; wherefore it cannot be expected they should ever consent to refund their ill-gotten wealth, and give up their usurped authority. Do wolves, foxes and lions ever freely deliver up their prey ? and are not the sheepish people the prey of the cannibal priests.

Is it to be supposed that such a head of iniquity could be thrown off without great struggles, and that so powerful and iniquitous a church would not do its utmost to preserve its power and wealth ? It was like taking away the goods of a common robber, which he had gotten with violence, fraud and repeated murders, who would not spare to do as much wickedness to keep what he had gotten, as he committed to get

get them. Soft, easy and gentle methods will not do in such cases ; triumphant villainy must be opposed by violence.

The Roman church has been founded, erected and cemented by blood, lust and sacrilege. It is a monster that has ever lived by blood. The innocent of mankind have been butchered to feed her pride and covetousness. Her spiritual markets have been the shambles of honest men ; these they have massacred in all nations, wherein they have ascended from beggary to dominion. The church at first came creeping in the mask of humility, meekness, submission, and all forgiveness ; but threw off the mask, and exercised her natural spirit of pride, insolence, tyranny, robbery, murder, and cruelty, as soon as ever she obtained the power. The persecutions of the pagans fell infinitely short of papal persecutions.

As for lust, from whence came her riches, but chiefly from brothel houles, and women married and unmarried privately dealing with priests ? Thus women being consecrated by the lusty sons of the church, the libidinous clergy are married to that strumpet the church, which was formerly the whore of Babylon ; but those

those who have been debauched by her, are now pretty well reconciled to her. What are all the gifts which have enriched the church, but the fruits of lust, prostitutes, rapes and rapine, bauds, pimps and panders, who left their ill-got gain to the church, to atone for the means they used in getting it.

As for sacrilege; did they not rob the heathens of their temples, and is not that as much sacrilege as robbing theirs? And is it not sacrilege to give that honor to man, which is only due to God? which has been and is constantly done by the church of Rome. Many protestants have learnt from them to call the word of the preacher the word of God. They honour the Pope as God Almighty, styling him his holiness; though Christ himself refused the appellation of good; to one that called him good master, he said, why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God.

As for the oneness or unity of their church in opinion; any two men among papists agree in their sentiments as little as any two among protestants. Men must differ by the necessity of their make, constitutions and understandings. When it seems to be otherwise in the church of

of Rome, it is hypocrisy, the effect of tyranny. To require all men to believe and judge alike, is an evident mark of imposture, because it requires men to do otherwise than ever God designed, being contrary to the nature of mankind so to do, unless they were all made and circumstanced alike.

*Ours is the church, say they, in which all saints lived and died. Brag is a good dog, but it should have been thus rather, Our church has the only true patent for saint making ; and our church has murdered all the saints ; therefore all the saints have died in it. My pills, says the impudent quack, are the only true catholic pills. Beware of counterfeits.*

The miracles that have been urged as proofs of the Romish being the true apostolic church, have certainly proved it to be as true as their miracles were. If that church can do a miracle, why don't they make us sensible of it. Let it be done openly, at noon day ; let the eyes of infidels be convinced, that their hearts may be converted. Ah, no, they can do no miracles here in Great Britain, because of our unbelief ; without faith a miracle would be a miracle indeed. Do miracles ever appear when they are called for ? or come when they are wanted ?

Their

Their religion and miracles are equally true and genuine. The proofs of a religion evidences the nature of the religion ; if therefore the proofs are imposture, so is the religion they are brought to confirm.

This church pretends that Jesus gave his power to Peter, and Peter to his successors (who were all the Popes that have been since) over the whole church, wherever its members are found throughout the whole world ; but this is contrary to the laws of Jesus, who appointed they should all be equal as brethren. But the church never had any thing to do with Peter, and it is a scandal to Jesus Christ, that his name should be professed by that church.

They say, that they alone inherit the name of catholics ; so do the devils inherit the name of angels, and they are as good angels as those of the Roman church are catholics ; that is, they are not the more so, nor the better for being so called ; but the church is indeed a catholic band of impostors. She hath by her doctrines endeavoured to pervert the natural sense, reason and understanding of mankind, and hath so done to those who have believed. Priests of this church compass sea and land to make one proselyte

felyte, and when he is so made, they make him two-fold more the child of hell than themselves.

What more stupid, foolish, knavish and blasphemous than their absurd and impious notions of God, to darken and destroy the reason, understanding and common sense of mankind, in what concerns Religion, that the one God is a ridiculous and nonsensical compound of deities, that the unchangeable infinite God changed into a mutable finite man, that the God of life was put to death, and that they live spiritually by eating him carnally ; and many persons have they burnt to death, for not believing such blasphemy and nonsense. Indeed, whatever we conceive concerning God, hurts not nor disturbs him ; nor does it affect him what we believe concerning him ; but it is most wicked and cruel to persecute people for professing, they cannot believe what is contrary to the common sense and reason of mankind, which no man can understand. What can be a more evident badge of an evil spirit, than persecution for notions, for false notions, for not believing base and absurd notions concerning God ? What greater demonstration of rage and violence ? How many have the church unjustly put to death, in all ages, ever since it existed, and in all

countries where it has existed unjustly and barbarously! What more horrid or hellish than the Inquisitions! What more stupid than placing holiness in actions of superstition, fasting, and mortification; in asserting that a priest is able to make water, earth, bricks, stones, wood, mortar, and things inanimate, holy; also little children who cannot understand what holiness or unholiness is.

This power to oppress and delude the people, the people have been foolish and easy enough to grant them, and they have so artfully fixt their dominion, that now they are not able to deprive them of it, because some of them who should do it, are bigotted adorers of the function; but unless the power of the church be lessened and broken, it cannot safely be tolerated in any kingdom.

All political governments, whether they have kings or priests for their heads, are so made by a *right* from the people, either freely given, or forcibly extorted. Kings and priests that pretend to have their mission from God, must have it from the people, *vox populi vox Die*. The government of God, is not tyrannical, but easy and natural; he rules us by our own consent; it

it is the *natural* voice of a free people, not the voice of tyrant priests, and of the *corrupted big-gotted* people ; it is the voice of freedom, not of slavery, for such is not the voice of the people, but of facerdotal tyrants ; therefore church government as well as kingly, is political. They are dependent on the people for their power and preservation ; therefore without the peoples approbation, they have no rightful existence. The king that is weak enough to tyrannize over his subjects, by the direction of a priest, lays the foundation of future misery to himself and them, for by this trap the priest tyrannizes over the king. The people being ill used, complain ; if their complaints are redressed, the people regain their liberty ; if not redressed, the king loses his, by being alway under the direction of his priest, who will not fail to increase his own Authority over him, and in proportion as the priest ascends to power, the prince descends to subjection : if the king dare rebel against the priestly sovereignty, the priests, one and all, that have a priestly spirit, join as in a common cause for the power of the church, stir up the people against the prince, or the prince against the people, to preserve their own dominion.

Did the church cease to do wickedly, the church would cease to exist. It has always exercised its art to deceive by fraud, and its power to force by violence.

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## L E C T U R E VII.

### *Against Popery.*

**I**T is every man's duty, who is a lover of truth, to vindicate it ; to do which, it is sufficient only to set things in a true light, and into the same to drag that monster imposture, which has bewitched and enslaved the much greater part of mankind, by the mask of religion, and by that of the christian religion, as professed by the greater number under that character, in that church which is ruled by the Bishop, Pope, or Papa of Rome, and therefore called by those that protest against it, Papists, and that church the popish church. But the name they give themselves, and which they are fond of, is that of Roman Catholics, can in no wise belong to them, being incompatible with common sense, the words signifying a limited universal church. Roman it is, but catholic or universal it cannot be :

be : For that is not the catholic church, which is circumscribed by the narrow limits of a prescribed faith ; but that only which comprehends all honest, virtuous and good men through-out the whole world. To which the Socinians and Quakers come nearer than any christian church I know.

Seeing that many in this part of the town adhere to the Romish religion, so pernicious to this state, and to the liberties enjoyed in this country, I determined to do my endeavour, if I cannot convince the bigots of that persuasion, at least to inform others, that they may not be carried away, and misled by designing men into that whirlpool of delusion ; nor countenance a religion so called, which teaches, vindicates, and practices every art and violence in its power, to raise itself over the natural rights and liberties of mankind, impoverishing and enslaving them, to make itself rich and powerful.

To oppose the spirit of popery, is therefore to oppose a pestilential evil, the most destructive to truth, virtue, religion and piety, that ever was in the world ; a spirit which has been the enslaver and destroyer of men, that has lived and fattened by the effusion of innocent blood,

by

by murders the most unjust, and by most cruel persecutions, by the most notorious impostures, that were ever committed by man, in support of the greatest superstitions and idolatry man ever practised.

To support the holy pretensions of this spirit or church, all are deemed by it heretics and infidels, who promote not her faction: therefore she can forgive, or claims a right to forgive, all sins but those of nonconformity to it; and to frighten the simple and ignorant, she declares all who are not within her pale, to be in the perilous state of damnation: for her presumption and pretended power, is so great, as to punish in another world her adversaries who escape her indignation in this; a notion taught by knaves and believed by fools. The reason of this is, because these heretics and infidels, join not with them in their wickedness, but expose the knavery of the leaders, and the credulity, folly and ignorance of those who are led by them.

In order to support and vindicate the detestable wickedness of this church, she has corrupted all history, the ablest pens of Rome have been employed to disguise and falsify all history of facts against her power or interest in which she had

had any concern, especially in the days of ignorance, before printing, and arts and sciences flourisht, when what learning was among us, was engros'd by monks, and those who had the chief power in the church, which they made the most use they could of to its advantage; for in it, their own was included. Nay, they have so corrupted our tradition of Jesus and his apostles, called the gospels, as point blank to make him the author and favourer of their barbarous practices and inhuman system. They make his coming to be on purpose to send fire and sword among mankind, Luke 12. 51. Bitter divisions and hatred, between the nearest and dearest relations, even to death, Luke 14. 26. What demon from the infernal regions could be dispatcht on a worse errand, if litterally understood. But being not defensible in this sense, against men of sense, and especially when power is wanting, we have liberty to explain these texts away. The enemies of their iniquitous church, they call Christ's enemies, and they have found or rather formed an order from Christ that such should be destroyed, Luke 19. 27. nay burnt, John 15. 6. And by their pretended commission to execute the terrors of the Lord, they not only persuade men, and like their ancient brethren, the superstitious and hypocritical pharisees

pharisees of old, they compass sea and land to make proselytes, but plead for authority to compel men to come in, that Christ's house, their church which they call so, may be filled ; which they practice with all their political power and engines of cruelty, having no rational method of proving their doctrines, nor of subjecting men to the authority of their church, and the tyranny of their priesthood, whereby to enslave the ignorant people to promote among them bigotry and beggary: nor is it any wonder that the practice of that church should be the most wicked, whose doctrines are the most stupid. What wonder is it, that men who eat their God, should devour men ? No wonder their practices have been void of all humanity, whose doctrines are void of all reason. If stupidity in the people, and imposture in the priests, was not productive of barbarity for their support, it would be of little significance what the one taught, and the other believed.

Infallibility is one pretended Character of the Pope or church of Rome, I care not where they lodge it. But if there is **none** good but one, that is God, I am sure there is none infallible but him. The being that is infallible, must be perfect, and unchangeably so ; for that which is changeable

ble may be imperfect and so fallible. Nothing is necessary to be believed which has not some proof that it is so. Now, if the bishop of Rome be infallible, and if he is infallibly God's vicar general upon earth, as he is pretended to be, he can infallibly prove it, and knows God; but what his knowledge of God is, is evidently nonsense and absurdity, (for God is not a contradictory compound, but one undivided pure and simple being) also that the unchangeable God was changed into man, or so far changed himself, as to take man's nature and form into himself, and that the Lord of life suffered death. And that the flesh and blood of this God, may be changed into bread and wine, or bread and wine into that, so that every man and woman may eat and drink a whole God; and though 100,000 of these gods are devoured daily, yet they are all but one God. This is all agreeable to Popery, which asserts nonsense, and sanctifies falsehood.

They are infidels who do not believe this great mysterious nonsense, who do not believe as the church teaches, that three Gods, each in himself is a distinct and perfect God, yet being put together make but one perfect God. The infidels ask, if Jesus Christ was a God,

an inhabitant in heaven, so long before he was an inhabitant of this world ; why he did not give a better account of the world he came from ? Whether he drank of the river Lethe by the way, and thereby forgot all that he knew before. They are ignorant that he bargained with his Father before the world began, to save a few of mankind (corrupted and damned by the sin of Adam) dearly bought by the loss of his blood and life. And that the Father was so inflexibly implacable to man, as to desire it, before he would be friends with the beings he had made. They wonder, if he came on that errand, he forgot to tell it to the world. They are ignorant that a Spirit can get a woman with child as a man may do, and wonder too why he that begot one, does not beget more ; because tho' this Son came to mend the world, by blotting out sin, yet wickedness has so prevailed that it has been rather worse than before, as the persecutions of the church have sufficiently proved ; They ask if the blending or uniting the manhood with the godhead, must not needs mar, and make an heterogenous deity. But these seemingly strong objections are all easily answered by true believers.

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That this God has flesh, blood and bones, in the form of man, which he took upon him, by coming thro' the body of a woman, betrothed to a human husband, seems to exceed, as some think, all human faith; but what cannot human faith exceed! That this God, a priest can make, as often as he pleases, of flour and water, without ever changing the form or nature of the cake; he changes it into this God, by speaking these few words, *Hoc est corpus meum*, from whence came the conjuring words, *Hocus pocus*; the wafer thereupon is immediately changed in substance to the eye of faith, not to the eye of sense; (for they judge by faith, not by sight,) into the very flesh and blood of the God Jesus, who hung upon a cross, and died above 1700 years ago, and tho' now believed to be in another world, yet is always present in this, and though limited to the dimensions of a man, can be wholly in ten thousand places at one and the same time, and enters into the bodies of believers; where he lies, like Jonas in the whale's belly, if not like his body in the grave, and what good he does there, or when he gets out, I could never learn nor understand. No wonder it is called a mystery. But surely instead of being the mystery of godliness, it is the mystery of iniquity. But the wonder is still

greater, that papists in a protestant country should not open their eyes where they may do it, and see that this is a darkness and imposture which may be felt; a God which they make, eat and worship. Of all the heathen impositions, never was any so great on the side of the god makers, nor any stupidity so gross on the side of believers. It is not to be wondered at, nor expected that those who are so infatuated as to believe such preposterous absurdities, so contrary to every animal sense, should ever hearken to reason. But from hence to conclude, we may learn two things.

First, That there are no absurdities and impostures too great for men to impose, to obtain wealth and dominion in the world. What difficulties cannot craft and policy, persevered in for ages, surmount? What is it that man's pride and covetousness fears to attempt? What is it that fraud and force fear to do? And what imposture, cannot the face of religion sanctify and defend? Learn from hence to put no faith in the most sanctified pretender, seeing these who are the directors of mens consciences, have the least conscience of all men, when their darling lusts are to be indulged, or their interests are concerned. Men of this class, who preach damnation

damnation to others, seem to take the utmost pains to deserve it themselves, or at least to convince all men who have but the least glimmering of intellectual light, that they believe a future state to be a bubble, and of use only to serve a present jobb.

Secondly, We may learn that there can be no absurdities and impostures invented, too gross for the ignorant to believe, and education to rivet in the minds of men ; and the most unreasonable notions ever promote the most obstinate bigotry ; for when men will not be convinced by their own senses, how can reason prevail, which must be built upon the evidence of sense, and the evident nature of things, or it has no foundation at all. When men are taught to believe that with God impossible things are possible, that he can raise chickens to a hen from stones instead of eggs ; can make a horse go through a pin hole, that faith can remove trees and gardens into a river by commanding it to be done ; that all things are possible to him that believes, that the immortal and infinite God can become mortal and finite man ; that there is a being called the devil, who brought sin into the world and God into a man, and killed the man that contained the God ; and  
tho'

tho' this God had wrought many miracles, he wrought not one for his own redemption, from an ignominious death, nor obtained it by his most fervent prayers, which shews he would have done it if he could; so that he did not succeed in being his own intercessor, yet he intercedes with God his father, for pardoning the sins of mankind, and is their redeemer from the infernal dungeon of fire and darkness. This is all Popery, and springs from taking the scriptures in a wrong sense\*. But from all such darkness, I shall endeavour to deliver my readers in future lectures. One of the popish bishops in Queen Mary's days, said, God could turn himself into a cardinal's cap.

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## L E C T U R E VIII.

### *Of Infallibility.*

**I**F there is in the world any infallible truth, there must be infallible marks of it, or means infallibly to know it by. If there be no infallible rule whereby it may be known, men can never come to any certainty about it; therefore those that make pretensions to the same foundation,

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\* *This is true in a spiritual sense, which this carnal antichristian church knows nothing of.*

foundation, attack one another's understandings of it. It cannot be an infallible foundation, nor rule, that cannot be the means of union, satisfaction, and rest to mankind.

Where can the infallibility sought for be found? Not in any thing liable or possible to change, for that only which is unchangeable is possest of it; that which is the same at all times and in all places, in the same circumstances hath it, and nothing else; and that is the immutable nature of God. That which the common sense of mankind, convinces them, never changes its laws and operations, but is always certain and constant, is the infallible rule of truth, and the qualities of things repeatedly known, and experienced by the common senses of mankind, are the means of judging what is true. Here then we have a sure foundation to build on, a certain rule to guide us in our enquires after truth, that is clear and evident, to all, not the presumptuous authority of men, pretending to have it from God, without reason, proof, or evidence; but the well known and undeniable Authority of God himself, is that of his own works. This then ought to be the only foundation men should build upon; and another true foundation can no man lay. Those who

deny

deny the evidence of common sense to be truth, are to be pitied, as wanting the natural taste and feeling of mankind.

The qualities of things are known to the common senses of men, they agree in what is called hot and cold, moist and dry, light and dark, heavy and light, soft and hard, bitter and sweet, white and black, and the different properties of things which their senses are judges of, some producing pleasure, others pain. They only differ in the comparative degrees of the properties of things, as their different abilities of sense enables them to judge: but every one forms a certain relative proportion of judgment, which enables men to agree in their opinions of the qualities, properties, powers, operations, or different natures of things, so much at least as is necessary, to form each person's degree of understanding, so as to harmonise in the whole, and unite their judgments of right and wrong, good and bad, which is common sense.

As all arts and sciences have the laws and powers of nature for their foundation and rule, so has true religion; only false religion takes another road, out of nature, which she pretends is above nature; but nothing above nature

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ture can be known nor conceived by man. This is pretended to, that the fallacies of false religion may not be understood and disproved. But by coming to the foundation of nature, we come to the only foundation of truth, and asking ourselves what would be the judgment of mankind in the same case proposed, is the way to cast off prejudice, and the certain means of forming as right a judgment of things as possible, which can never fail us, if we are impartial lovers and seekers of truth: By not adverting to this rule, all men have, in all ages, divided into sects and factions in opinion, and obstinately maintained their errors as truths, to the subverting the peace and happiness of mankind, and involving each other and themselves in confusion and misery.

The Roman church knowing, that without an infallible rule, she can claim no pretensions to be the only right and true church, assumes to herself the authority of Infallibility, by a power delegated to her from Christ. But infallible truth admits of no disagreement.

The Romish religion, as well as all others, was ever split into sects and factions from its earliest times, and had most violent differences

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arising from the smallest occasions, from those of the most indifferent and senseless nature, and therefore only merited contempt; but as managed by the violent spirit of popery, became destructive and deadly: surely the popes have not more infallibility than the apostles, nor the present church than the primitive.

From the beginning were factions and divisions in christianity. The leaders, by prejudice or interest, adhering to their educated opinions. Paul withstood Peter, for temporising with the Jews, in the case of eating with the Gentiles, Gal. ii. 11. altho' Peter first practised that freedom to which he was invited by a pair of miracles. Acts. x. And Paul temporised with the Jews in circumcising Timothy. Acts xvi. Tho' he declared, *whoever among the believing Gentiles was circumcised, Christ would profit him nothing.* Gal. v. 2. Paul and Barnabas fell out so as to part from one another, about chusing a servant to wait upon them, Acts xvi. 36. 40. And never, that we read, were they reconciled after. Tho' the first promulgators of christianity are affirmed to write by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, Peter disapproves of the writings of Paul for being in many places unintelligible, tho' he calls him beloved brother. 2 Peter iii. 16. Paul

swears

swears in Gal. i. that immediately after his conversion he went into Arabia, and that it was three years after, before he saw Peter and James, and yet by the history of his peregrinations in the Acts, told two or three times over, he went not there. Paul says he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, Phil. iii. 5. Barnabas, in the epistle that is current in his name, says, Paul was a proselite of the Gentiles. Paul declared before Ananias the high priest, that he was a pharisee, and was called in question for the resurrection, which the Pharisees believed, that they being there present, might deliver him, or to obtain their favour, tho' he was not then a pharisee but a christian, and examined for being so, and not for believing the resurrection. Was not this prevaricating and temporising? How are all their words divine truth, and infallibly to be depended on? If the Apostles themselves were fallible men, how came the bishop of Rome to be infallible? What infallible guide then have any christians, papists or protestants? And if the spirit which many of both parties pretend to be possesst of, was an infallible guide, should we not see some proofs of it; but we have proofs of the contrary by the disagreement of all pretenders to it.

It would fill a volume, and therefore would be tiresome, if not endless, to mention all the different opinions which have sprung up in the roman church embraced by the heads of it themselves, and by those who own but one head. To mention only the notions that have been vented and entertained of the divinity of Christ, whether he was half God, or whole God, how the divine and human natures in him were mixt and compounded, are all confounding to common sense, and would be but a rehearsal of so many absurdities, as there were opinions and parties in the bowels of the church: Nor was there any more proof of orthodoxy in one age of it, than in another, but as power prevailed. Those who had the greatest power, were always most orthodox, and the most lasting power confirmed the doctrines which constitute the true church; falsely called, catholic. Calvin threw off her superstitions, but retained her barbarous and nonsensical doctrines.

I find not therefore any infallible guide, in man's authority, to salvation; but if there be a salvation, every man is left to grope out the way for himself, and all nations of men, as Paul said, *Acts xvii. 26. 27. are to seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him, tho' be be not*

*not far from every one of us, so that he is as near to us as he was to them ; therefore we are to seek and feel for ourselves. And Jesus upbraiding the Jews for their neglect in seeking truth, says, Luke xii. 57. Yea, and why even of your own selves judge ye not that which is right ? which however, those who are prejudiced in favour of what is wrong, cannot do.*

No church upon earth can give us any proof of its being infallible, or having an infallible guide ; If you will not take it for granted, that it has, you cannot be deceived. Numberless are the proofs of the fallibility of every church and every guide. If you seek for a proof of infallibility in any man or men, or in the works or words of men, you will be able to find it no where ; all human authority, antiquity, miracles, prophecies and writings, are fallible ; the bishop of Rome is no more infallible than any private man, or than any other bishop or prelate, believer or unbeliever, inspired or uninspired. Common sense and reason, founded on mens experience of things, is every man's best guide, and better than leaning on any infallible pretender or pretensions which are unable to be supported by any natural or reasonable method or evidence.

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Man, and all the works of man, are fallible : The scriptures were the writings of men, therefore fallible, and they appear evidently to be so, as they contain many inconsistences and errors, in the plain natural and literal sense, which men therefore are obliged to explain away, in order to vindicate what they would enforce by that authority. As they are the works of men, they are fallible in their original , and as they have been transcribed and translated by fallible men, they are fallible in their transcribed copies and translations ; fallible in their signification, fallible in their interpretations, fallible in divers parts, and therefore in the whole ; if they were originally the writings of God himself, they would become fallible when transcribed, translated and interpreted by men, and the oftner so, the more fallible. If any thing appear in the scriptures to be absurd, and in one place contrary to, or inconsistent with another, or to human reason, can it be denied that it has not the appearance of fallibility. If it be only liable to be falsely understood, it is fallible to us. If Romish church or pontiff, pretends to give an infallible explanation, but gives no infallible proof of that ability, it is but vain pretension ; and he is certainly misled who believes it, and but blest, who depends for infallibility on any thing without

out a sensible infallible proof to himself of its being so.

Whatever traditions we depend on, are to be doubted of, and mistrusted, as they have been conveyed to us, not only by a fallible, but a false church ; a church which has sanctified falsehoods and false miracles to support her cause. Ecclesiastic historians were men partial to their party, and wrote not from knowledge or conviction, but copied false stories one after another ; nor were they always able to judge of truth, if they had it in view. Ignorance or interest for the most part governed their pens. Those who wrote in favour of church authority were always on the safest side, which ever did and will justify any stories that tend to the advantage of the church ; what is truth in the scriptures, which are of consequence to enlighten our judgment, and to direct our conduct, are known by their own intrinsic nature, harmonising with reason and the nature of things. Supernatural stories, which afford us no natural proof, are no more a guide to our understandings, than they are examples for our practice. What was not done on our account, concerns not us ; and what we are told was, as we are only told so, and men will lye for their own advantage, or may through ignorance,

ingnorance, we should have some good reason to convince us of the truth of it. Common history may be believed or not believed, it matters not much, if it concerns not us; uncommon history requires uncommon testimony, and more so, if it be of uncommon concern, or pressed on us to receive it as such. Surely what is immediately from God, cannot depend on, nor stand in need of man's testimony, but carries its own light and evidence with it; otherwise, if it lose the evidence it ought to have as coming from God, and rest on the evidence of man, we receive it as the word of man; if what comes from God stands in need of this, it is impossible for man to know what is of God, and what not. The writings we call sacred, do not appear to be the infallible word of God, because there is no end of the contentions about understanding them; if the guide that may be supposed to be infallible in itself is not so to me, it cannot be received by me as such.

In the first, second and third century of christianity, the christian world was overrun with forged or corrupted gospels, epistles, revelations, martyrologies, miracles, legends and lyes, which were called *mendacia sacra*, and encouraged for the good of the church, which were in the times

times of ignorance and imposition received as authentic, but have been since rejected by honest men of learning and understanding of all persuasions. Some historians have been credulous men, who being no judges of truth or error, took up with any authority, and gathered together both good and bad ; they were men who sought not truth, or had no judgment to distinguish it ; so that what was truth, could not be depended on from such writings, unless confirmed by others of more judgment. Some are easily imposed on ; others write with design to impose on, and mislead the understandings of men ; their business is not to search out truth, but to disguise it. Before printing was practised, ‘ the world lay involved in the thickest mists of ignorance ; superstition and credulity triumphed without controul, and spurious pieces, filled with idle and improbable stories prevailed.’ Let this suffice for writings.

And what reason is there to believe the popes were more infallible than other men ? Does power or prerogative give infallibility ? for in that case only they were superiors. That many of them have been as wicked, as abominably wicked as the worst of tyrants, is undeniable ; notwithstanding the pains that have been taken to

extenuate their crimes, which were as great as their power. Quarrels and wars arose between them and emperors many years, which occasioned 78 battles, and in them a vast effusion of blood, and the destruction of an infinite number of innocent people. Was the kingdom, or church of Christ, then of this world or not? If it was, it was strangely changed; if it was not of this world, it was not his church. By the vilest of means the bishops of Rome have been raised, from the lowest and meanest beginnings, to the highest pitch of grandeur, by the deepest policy of men that ever was practised upon earth, of men of the greatest natural and acquired abilities that ever were known, and by the most subtil and politic measures obtained absolute dominion over mens bodies and minds, whereby they acquired also their estates; and to compleat the farce, assumed to themselves a sovereign power, not only over the living, but the dead, and taught the superstitious multitude to believe they had such power. By the excessive ignorance of those dark times, and by the inactivity of some discerning men, and the indolence of others, the greatness, dominion and wealth of the church, was effected, till it overbalanced the state. When fraud and force had raised the heads of the church to uncontroulable power,

power, then, and not till then, these heads were declared to be the infallible oracles of God, and guides of men. But facts, undeniable facts, prove their fallibility ; for history shews, that the decrees and constitutions of one pope have been reversed by another, and have confessed not only their predecessors, but even themselves had been mistaken. Pope Liberius signed the Arian Creed, which was declared heretical by all his successors. Pope Honorius, was condemned by the fathers of the sixth oecumenical council, as an organ of the devil, for holding the heresy of the Monothelites. Pope John the 22d preacht up and propagated by his missionaries and his legates, *a latere*, a doctrine, which he himself retracted on his death bed. \* We read of seven Popes, cursing and damning (in emulation of one another) all who denied a certain tenet, viz. that the Franciscan Friars, had no property in common or in private, and the said John 22d as heartily cursing and damning all who maintained it ; nay, and recurring to the *ultimo ratio* of the later Popes, with fire and faggot, in order to root out of the church what

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\* See Bower's history of the Popes, page ix. of the preface.

he called, so pestilential, erroneous, heretical, and blasphemous a doctrine. The Franciscan Friars, who had occasioned this dispute, paid dear for it, as they continued to plead the infallibility of seven Popes, against that of one, and obstinately adhered to their doctrine. Pope John losing all patience, ordered them all to be burnt alive, who did not receive his constitution, which was done accordingly, and many of those unhappy wretches chose rather to expire in the flames, than to yield. These remarkable transactions are related by several cotemporary writers of unquestionable authority, and among the rest by Nicolaus Eymericus, who was inquisitor of the Province of Taragon, and has inserted them in his *directorium inquisitorum*. Other facts without number of the same nature occur in history, and are alike irreconcileable with the other prerogatives claimed by the Popes, as well as with the chief articles of the Roman Religion, and all so well attested, that nothing I think can withstand the force of truth thus displayed.

If fallibility be as apparent in the Roman church and pontiff as in any other, how is it better than any other? If pretension to infallibility cannot be made good, but proved to be imposture, were not all those Popes who pretended to it,

false

false pretenders and impostors ; and if the heads of a church are impostors, is not the church, which is so governed, a false church ?

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## L E C T U R E IX.

### *On Mortification.*

SOME there be that require men to mortify themselves by acting contrary to their nature, in order to please God, as if this world was indeed the devil's kingdom, and the nature of man was to do every thing contrary to right and good, being as they are told, by nature *the children of wrath*. Therefore they are required to love their enemies, and hate their friends; to give and lend all they have ; to forsake all their possessions and enjoyments; to take no thought for bodily wants, but for their souls good, which is rather for the good of the church. And they are required to fast and pray, and watch, and punish the body for the good of the soul, by various ways, and are taught that such sort of behaviour, which is called penance, will atone for sins, and appease deity, who otherwise is revengeful and merciless,

merciless, as they represent him. So the Jacobite and heathen priests urged the necessity of blood and murder, to bring their God into a good humour. But reason and good nature, condemns such conduct. To speak first of *fasting*, either private or public : Does it please God to see men pining and whining with hunger ? Every virtue should be opposed to some vice, and every action contribute to some natural end. What vice can this of fasting suppress, but the vice of gluttony ; does God act by men, as foolish parents do by their children, who when they are naughty refuse them *vituals* ? If fasting be only a cure for gluttony and drunkenness, it needs only be practised by those that are guilty of those vices ; what need have the poor to fast, who have food in scanty measure, or those that live sparingly ? As luxury can never be a general sin, I see no need that fasting should at any set time be a general duty. If the sin of feasting requires the penance of fasting, or fasting atones for feasting, it suits with the vulgar, who love to run into extremes, and therefore practice both. If the church did not indulge the one, what need she command the other ? What is all public feastings, but luxury ? and all public fasting, but formality ? Is fasting itself a virtue ? one would think it not, unless eating be a vice. They that eat or drink

more

more than they should at one time, and thereby have injured their constitutions, should fast after it, or use some evacuations to repair that injury. Thus penance sometimes make the atonement to nature. But concerning its ability to please God or nature, in any other manner, my ignorance cannot perceive it, unless God is displeased to see men eat their food, which they cannot bless him for giving them, if they must not eat. *But fasting and prayer is bumbling the soul before God.* Well, if the soul has been sensible of pride, then it is good to humble it. If men have been luxurious and proud, let them fast and pray ; I have no objection to their doing it, to bring down their stomachs ; but what need those who are not guilty of these sins, punish themselves for the sins of others ? If men have been guilty in secret, they may fast in secret ; if in public, let them do it publickly ; public sins requires public confession and atonement. I do not understand why a man who shews by his conduct, that he does not love fasting himself, nor is displeased with feasting, should recommend fasting to others, as an act of extraordinary devotion ; But *temperance* preserves the body and mind in the holiest and happiest state, teaching content, humility and tranquility,

tranquility, by bridling inordinate desires that prey on the vitals of happiness: and sometimes excess brings sudden death: Therefore said Jesus, Luke xxi. 34. *Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and that day come upon you unawares.* What day? The day of Christ's coming, for which men have long watched in vain. Watching is a piece of mortification, which brings no honor to God, nor good to man, but tends to make men stupid and blind both in body and intellects. Can any one tell what advantage it is to man to deny himself bodily sleep? And if it be none, why should it be supposed God requires it? The disciples watched for their master's coming upon them *like a thief in the night.* It has been a long night, but thank God it is now morning in Great-Britain, so that we who see the light have no occasion to watch.

Epicurus, that mirror of temperance and sobriety, than whom no man has been more belied and unjustly slandered in this article, highly recommended and practised these virtues, more than most christians or philosophers. He says, ' it hardly can be expressed how great good redounds from sobriety, which reducing a man

‘ to

‘ to a thin, simple and spare diet, by happy experience teaches how little that is which nature requires, and that her necessities may be abundantly satisfied with slender and easily provided food, such as decocted barley, fruits, herbs and fountain water.’ He shews that temperance and sobriety brings and preserves health, and the functions of the mind in serenity, acuteness and vigor, enabling men to eat their food with delight and appetite, and makes them superior to the threats of fortune. But fasting on the other hand, makes men sour tempered, sick and faint, dejected, dispirited, dull and vaporish; therefore is the most improper conduct that can be, to be practised at the beginning of a war, for at these times the spirits of men ought rather to be roused, and raised by good nourishment to heroism, high spirits and vengeance.

Then fasting from flesh, and eating fish, seems to be a piece of fishermens craft, as if fish was more holy than flesh. Did Peter and his followers appoint it for the good of their trade? I remember I have read, or been told long ago, of one, that in a public house, ate rashers of broiled bacon on Good Friday, which some there present thought very irreligious; but he eat on, and left behind him at departing the following verses;

O

Who

*Who can suppose, with common sense,  
A bacon slice gives God offence?  
Or has a berring such a charm,  
Almighty vengeance to disarm?  
Enrapt in happiness divine,  
Does he regard on what we dine ?*

They that endeavour to crucify every sensual appetite, as if they would live altogether without sense, by imagination called faith, see things invisible, and hear things unutterable, and have a sense of feeling which no body has but themselves. These people are ever condemning and tormenting themselves and others with their fantastic notions, and vapours which fasting breeds. Their rational powers are by wrong exercise run mad.

But the rational man enjoys all his faculties of mind and body in the most proper manner ; his reason affords him a sedate and wise rule of action, which, as much as he can, follows the perfection of nature in all her ways, and imitates her in all her works ; he considers causes and consequences ; and directs his actions accordingly, as the nature and reason of things require. This principle is the mother of laws and

and sociability ; for the reasonable man makes the felicity of others his own, and his own such as gives felicity to others ; so corroborating and increasing the happiness of mankind, gratifying whatever nature requires in himself and others with reason and moderation, in such degree as is consistent with public and private happiness.

In things that concern the judgment and understanding, he sees for himself, and will neither be imposed on, nor impose on others : he considers what is right, and maintains it without hire against opposition, and acts according to it. Folly, tho' sanctified ; and nonsense, tho' sacred, he despises : He alone is the patron of freedom, the opposer of tryanny, imposture and oppression ; he is the defender of justice and virtue, which without illustration and defence would sink ; and confusion, folly and madness would govern the world. When the judgment is not rational, the practice cannot be right ; men so besotted believe absurdities and practice folly.

We ought not to deny ourselves those pleasures which nature, reason and our circumstances require, and enable us to indulge ourselves in the enjoyment of ; only reason and prudence always teach us to consider our ways, and keep the

mean of all extremes, and to use moderation in all things, by which our health, life and substance are preserved, and so live to day, as we may live to morrow, and neither fear death, nor desire it. Jesus Christ in his life time, neither macerated himself with penance, nor his disciples ; but lived freely with them, and was therefore called by the ceremonious and fasting pharisees, *a glutton and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.* Higher pretensions than ordinary are extraordinary presumptions ; and are always productive of just reflections. Too much righteousness, that is, a too great pretension to it, a profession of a measure of it more than is reasonable and natural, favours of weakness or hypocrisy, and is no other than superstition and formality. Let us consider our ways as men and philosophers, behaving as each man in his particular station ought to do, is enough for us to aim at or pretend to. The world do somewhat justly mark every little slip and imperfection of those that are severe on every little slip and imperfection of others. They love to insult a spiritual pride, and humble a sour haughtiness and a supercilious behaviour, which is always injurious to a good desposition, destructive of genuine virtue, and the frankness of undissembled honesty.

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The spirit that scandalizes nature is not the spirit of God. The spirit which tells you the nature of man is wholly sinful, that man is dipt or plunged all over in sin, from his mother's womb, and must therefore be mortified ; that man must oppose, thwart, contradict, and fight against his own nature, to become righteous, is the spirit of contradiction. He who always confesses his heart to be notoriously evil, either knows it to be so, and confesses the truth ; and therefore so it is, or he does it for custom or fashion sake, and is a hypocrite ; but he who takes care to keep a good conscience, cannot believe he has a bad one.

A voluntary mortification of evil dispositions, is the evidence of a virtuous heart, and produces commendable words and good actions ; but bodily mortification is carnal, and outside religion, of no real value ; such as to fast or feed little, to eat fish instead of flesh, to watch much, denying one's self natural rest, to lay hard, to bear cold, to wear rough garments, to walk bare feet, to scourge the flesh, or by any ways and means to macerate and torment it, is not destructive of any vicious habit or bent of the mind ; therefore these are mortifications that produce

produce no good, and not what virtue and prudence direct to the practice of.

To be mortified to all the innocent pleasures and happiness of life; to taste no felicity here, in hopes of enjoying all hereafter, is folly. We ought to enjoy those good things we honestly acquire, and thank our benefactor for our benefits, bless the power that enables us so to sweeten life, and the wisdom that thus instructs us how to be happy. But if we deceive ourselves, or suffer ourselves to be deceived, it makes not God our debtor. What surety have we, because we sow to ourselves sufferings, that therefore we shall reap eternal satisfaction? He that enjoys his own life, is good natured, and willing that others should enjoy their lives; his heart is open to pity and bounty; but he that torments himself for God's sake, will torment others for the same; he is pitiless, and close fisted. Many of the most sanctified professors are the most covetous persons; this world they blame, as if their maker had made it wrong, and yet this world they crave more than open sinners; and at dying they make the greatest lamentations on leaving this dear world, tho' they believe, or pretend to believe, they hope to enter into a better.

I shall conclude with Solomon's advice, Eccles. xi. 9. 10. ' Rejoice O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes : But know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee to judgment.' Considering that reflection will follow ill conduct; in these things avoid excess. ' Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh; for childhood and youth are vanity,' to act without discretion is vanity.

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## LECTURE X.

### *On Mortification.*

**M**ORTIFICATION mongers, would persuade people that their austerities and severities are the duties of a religion that is conducive to happiness in another life; under that notion they destroy all the good of this; this is bartering a certainty for an uncertainty, both with respect to the means and the end; for why should displeasing ourselves please God? are not our natures such as he has given us, and

and why should contemning the gift please the giver, for is it not contemning it, to act in direct opposition to it? and respecting the end, uncertainties attend things future even in this life; and are less to be expected in things utterly unknown? the assurance of which is pretended to come from something above nature, because it is not found in nature; but if a future state be undeniably evident, yet the enjoyment of happiness hereafter by denying ourselves happiness here, is using means that are without evidence to answer the end.

Parting with all a man has for a share in the kingdom of heaven, is a very great mortification. The rich man thought so, who was guilty of no crime but being rich, and unwilling to purchase it at so high a price; perhaps he considered too that if he did, he could not be sure of it then: He had Christ's word for it indeed; which is sufficient for a Christian. But he did not care to take his bare word, and be a certain great loser for uncertain gain. I suppose he was a merchant, because he was willing to make a more sure bargain; and not venture his all for profit in a country too remote for living correspondence, which it appears he knew not the way to, by his enquiry after it. Yet this is

is the way to heaven in the gospel, for surely he was not required to go a different way thither than others ought to go. That seems not to have been just.

Why are men required to bear all manner of persecutions for the sake of the gospel? can it not be supported without; if it cannot, is it not advised and enforced for the good of the church? What pleasure can it give to God, that men should suffer pain for his cause? and he not rather defend and preserve them from sufferings? what honour brings it to him, that men should serve him, on to the hardest terms; as that all a man has, his kindred and his own life, must be bartered for the favour of Christ and salvation? Why is heaven held forth at so dear a price? Why is the way to it made so straight, that *few there be who find it, and the gate so narrow,* that *few go in there at?* Cannot God be gracious without being severe? or merciful but to a few, without being cruel to infinitely more? Are these things agreeable to infinite mercy? to a *Lord God, gracious and merciful, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth?* to a *God whose tender mercies are over all his works?* What mercy is shewn in hell? Has not the church made the way to heaven straight, and the gate narrow, that she

may squeeze the more wealth out of those she can persuade to endeavour to obtain her promised prize ; for what methods has she not contrived to enrich herself ; she barters her heaven for this earth, to advance and establish her power and presumption.

Let it be understood, that when I say the church, I always mean *the mother church* of Rome, that polluted fountain, from which all the polluted streams have run, who has been the mother of plagues and penance to mankind, the mother of mysteries and confusion.

There are troubles enough that naturally arise in the world to mortify man, and try his temper, without tormenting his body, by creating to himself voluntary afflictions. Evil dispositions are to be mortified, but not the poor passive body. And men would never mortify the one for the other, if they did not love their own wicked tempers better than their body ; or find it more hard to curb the one, than punish the other. It is easier for most people to seem religious, than be truly honest ; therefore to compound for keeping their sins, they go to church, pray devoutly, hear attentively, read sermons, fast at least from flesh twice a week, nay give to the poor,

poor, and do good to some, that they may be indulged in doing wickedly, or behaving ill to others. Tho' all the business of their religion is penance to them, they'll submit to it all, to keep their beloved lusts; these are the ends of bodily mortification.

But if men would mortify themselves aright, let them mortify their unruly passions, their exorbitant desires, and evil dispositions. Are you in high life, and lifted up in that station; mortify yourself by humility. Are you rich, and swelled with being so, or covetous; mortify yourself by giving to the needy, and distributing alms deeds: would you be thought righteous of men, do righteous actions, and let the light of them shine out before men, that they, seeing your good actions, may glorify your heavenly father. Are you low and poor; mortify yourself by labour and contentment. Are you ill used and despised; 'tis sufficient mortification to slight the offence and bear it patiently. Do not return evil for evil, nor railing for railing. Is it in your power to revenge an injury done you; forgive it. Endeavour to reconcile your enemies by a placable conduct. Such practices as these are laudable mortifications. Every constitution has some temper to subdue; every

state some ills to bear. To conquer all unlawful desires, and those lawful ones that cannot be gratified; to bear disappointments with patience, and such like, are laudable mortifications.

Men are apt to run into extremes, and all extremes are evil. The extreme of piety is impiety. The nature of man in every case has certain bounds, beyond which it deviates to evil. Therefore, Solomon says, *Be not righteous overmuch*, as well as, *be not overmuch wicked*; for the former, as well as the latter, leads to destruction. To keep in the mean between all extremes, is wisdom; therefore a wise man will not run into them: But he who is religiously taught to despise wisdom, is fitted to commit any folly that his religion dictates. If we throw away that life, or the happiness of it, which God has given us to enjoy, in the supposed service of God, which God requires not, may he not justly say to us, *who required these things at your hands?* Happy is he that keeps the golden mean. To be ever thwarting and crucifying nature to make it better, is to make it worse. It becomes ill, by being used ill. It reflects on God, as if he had given us a sense of good, and means of enjoying it, only to make us wretched by denying ourselves those sensible

sensible and necessary enjoyments: It is best not to covet too much the good things of life, nor to despise what we find good in it: The one makes us too loth to die; the other unthankful for what we have. The ebbs and floods of passion and despondency should be avoided as much as possible; to cross all evil desires, and mortify all evil inclinations, is sufficient crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts.

Dogged spirits have little need of any mortification, their sullenness and illnature is sufficient for their punishment; high towering and ambitious minds, need a mortifying weight, as ballast is needful to preserve a high mast ship from oversetting. Ambition of every kind, tho' laudable, which for certain ends, a man's genius prompts him, ought to be carefully conducted. If his ends are laudable for the preservation of the state, or to restore the lost liberties of the people, let him pursue whatever may be the consequence; but if the means are unsurmountable, 'tis best for his happiness, and therefore his wisest practice, to endeavour by all means in his power to break off his mind from so fruitless a pursuit; for 'tis the greatest unhappiness in nature, earnestly to desire what cannot be obtained; and 'tis on the contrary,

contrary, the sweetest enjoyment, for a man to delight himself with what he has, to covet nothing but what is within his power; and to be pleased with that. We shall find content at least, if we suck out from the station possessed, what benefit and comfortable support that station affords. When a man finds by experience, and especially by repeated experiences, that he cannot obtain the state desired, he should bring his desires to the state, and bound them by his circumstances; as they say Mahomet taught, by calling to him a mountain, which not coming, he went to the mountain.

That a man may delight himself in what enjoyment the manner of life he is in affords, let him often meditate on the present comforts, and the conveniences of the condition he enjoys, which, if some inconveniences attend, so they do in every station of life—Again, let him consider, that we do not always desire what is best for us; perhaps the state desired would afford more anxiety if known, than the present; or greater troubles may attend that, than this; which when experienced upon trial, it may be too late to repent of.

Is it wisdom you seek? 'tis not a high pitch of wisdom, but the enjoyment of modest and moderate delights makes life happy: Wisdom is only necessary to regulate those enjoyments. Is it a grave and studious life you crave? 'Tis mirth, inoffensive mirth, and innocent pleasure give happiness to life. Is it to be exalted in the state? a condition which exposes a man to every one's censure, is not desirable by him that would live free from perturbations, which discompose the mind. They that conquer their desires in these respects, what passions may they not learn to conquer which are hurtful to a happy repose? and indeed he that can do so, is wise and happy: for wisdom and happiness consist more in well governing our passions, than in indulging those that cannot be gratified, or gratifying them by means not commendable. A laudable end should be pursued in a laudable manner.

To be ever coveting what can never be gained, is harboring a never-dying worm within, and a fire that never can be quenched, which are torments everlasting, or as long as we last. 'Tis turning an eternal wheel like Ixion, or rolling always a stone up hill like Sisyphus, which cannot be kept there, but immediately rolls down

down again to renew the endless labour. 'Tis drawing water in leaky buckets like the Danaids, which ere they get to the well's brink are empty. 'Tis thirsty Tantalus, having the pleasure of apples and water present in view, and at the lips of enjoyment, without being able ever to taste the one or the other.

Besides, ambition and covetousness, have no bounds. If they gain one ascent, 'tis as uneasy there, when rest is required, as before ; and the gnawing pain remains till it arrives at another ascent ; and this being gained, when it should be enjoyed, affords no more satisfaction than the former. Thus the restless man goes on, and vainly strives and hopes for that repose which he never finds, till labour and anxiety bring him to his grave, where he is obliged to enjoy a senseless rest, for he never could enjoy a sensible one.

The principal thing in life, is *the conduct of life* ; It requires a man to be *as wise as a serpent, and as harmless as a dove*. To cast before hand what ought to be done, or said, so as to do or say the best, in order to effect the best ends. And what a man cannot remedy by his conduct, to bear with resignation to the all-ruling power.

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To get a living by honest labour, and bear with undeserved and unavoidable evils in the world, is sufficient mortification to most minds and bodies; tho' these are productive of evident good; the one brings consolation to the mind, the other health to the body. It becomes every one to practice the ways most conducive to his happiness, consistent with the happiness of others.

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## LECTURE XI.

### *Of the Light within.*

*Of that immortal light which shines in man,  
Sing heav'nly muse; for none but heavenly can.*

**T**HAT there is a light in the minds of men, mens minds perceive; and that this light is that of mens understandings, men of understanding know. The beings that have natural intellects, are endued with this natural intellectual light. Tho' I call it natural, I don't deny its being divine; for the nature of things is the offspring of the divine nature. Therefore tho' 'tis human, 'tis heavenly, and tho' born in man, it is begotten of God; and as this inward

Q

illumination

illumination is man's only true light from God ; 'tis the only begotten son of God, the God incarnate, or God humanized. 'Tis human nature uncorrupted, therefore human perfection : 'Tis the spirit that calls God father. The motions and instructions of it, are such as are suitable to the dignity of its descent from God. 'Tis that which discerns a God ; therefore 'tis the way to him ; it discovers to us the truth that is of God, 'tis therefore the word of God, who speaks by his works to our understanding ; 'tis a spiritual living nature, therefore 'tis the spirit, the life, the Christ of God ; the basis of true religion is founded hereon, and must be the christian foundation, if the christian be true, for on this can no false structure be erected. All the mysteries of christianity are manifest in this light, and in this only. Herein I shall reconcile Deists and Christians, and shew that in this Christ they are all one, so are Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, male and female ; one universal light enlightens all. In this union the wall of partition is broken down—It is by this true light only that every truth is seen, and all things are known that can be known : without it, we cannot distinguish nor know any thing. There is not one natural light which teaches natural things, and another supernatural which teaches things divine,

divine, for all our knowledge of divinity is by natural means, and we know nothing supernatural, but if such was the light, such would be its informations and instructions ; it would produce effects of like kind, and appear with supernatural proofs. Therefore this light which I am presenting to your view, is an invariable, fixt and steady light ; which always shews to all men the same truths, when attended with the same circumstances ; as the same cause always produces the same effect. 'Tis not an enthusiastic flash like lightening, such as fools and madmen sometimes have, and pretenders to supernatural inspiration lay claim to : All the inspiration of the God of nature, is the inspiration of nature.

Every one who leaves this natural light for something supernatural, which he cannot conceive nor describe, is an enthusiast. The difference between the one and the other is this, and by this you shall know them : He that makes natural light his guide, can reason coolly and clearly, but he that despises reason, and presumes to soar above it, sinks below it : All his proofs are from blind erroneous and dogmatical authority. He strives to work on your passions, as the spirit of madness works on his ; and nails down the free enquirer, with damnation,

tion, for not being a confin'd believer. But I leave these to those who claim the same power, to damn one another. It is certain that those who consign mens souls to hell fire, would, if their real power was equal to their pretended, consign their bodies to earthly flames. They that do thus, are already in hell fire ; they have fire without light; they have a zeal which burns with wrath, but not the light of understanding, which diffuses love. Such are all those *who rebel against the light, who know not the way thereof, nor walk in the paths thereof;* who prostitute their pens and parts to justify the wicked for a reward, who gloss over iniquity, and sanctify sins, or who, thro' prejudice by censure and slander, agreeable to the constitution and custom of modern saints, take away the righteousness of the righteous from him. The light of God within is extinguished by such deeds as these.

What man can justify the bloody rage and robbery of the old fashioned saints ? he is fit to justify the impieties of the new, the detestible cruelty of the Spaniards in the West-Indies, the barbarities and injustice of Popish Inquisitions. If a Jew vindicates the murders, rapines and rapes, the ancient Jews committed on the gentiles,

ties, does he not by this teach the gentiles to guard themselves against the Jews ? If gentiles vindicate these things, have they not imbibed the dregs of judaism ? The ceremonies of the law were priestly policy, but these are immoralities. They may be ridiculed, these are to be abhorred : *Wo be unto them that call good evil, and evil good; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness.*

As the light of nature does not teach us to do evil to others voluntarily, nor to vindicate those that do, either for God's sake or our own, so it instructs us not to plague others, or ourselves, and think by so doing to please God; not to believe that God will not make men happy, unless men make themselves miserable; or that mortification is the means to sanctification. The light of nature does not tell us that God is better pleased to see us eat fish than flesh, or rather neither, that a hungry stomach is a more sanctified state than a full belly; that God has given men appetites to be opposed, desires tending to maintain and propagate life, to be denied; which are to be enjoyed under the regulations of reason. Natural light does not teach us that God is pleased when we are grieved, and grieved when we are pleased; that he loves to see mankind groaning, whining, lamenting, and

and starving, rather than to see them healthy, cheerful, rejoicing and feasting, and requires them to crucify every pleasing desire, tho' lawful and reasonable ; in fine, to renounce every thing that conduces to the pleasure and satisfaction of the flesh, as disagreeable to the spirit and law of God. He that teaches and practices this doctrine, wants the true light of a good understanding in *this* point, however he may shine in *others* ; and tho' he may be a *good* man, I cannot in *this* respect esteem him a *wise* man. He may deserve no reproach, because of his sincerity, but merits no praise, because of his mistaken judgment. The light of nature allows a man to delight himself in all innocent, lawful and reasonable enjoyments. And none are more free to contribute to the happiness of others, than those that are most happy in themselves. The mortified man is most *sour* when he would be most *solemn* ; he that learns to be cruel to himself for God's sake, will soon become cruel to others, for the same cause ; and at length his greatest acts of piety, will be acts of impiety and cruelty. From the doctrine of mortification came human sacrifices.

Superstition is not guided by the light of nature, but of man's invention ; the light of enthusiasm

thusiasm is the delirium of a light head, which leads men into the wild meanders and inextricable mazes of imaginations supernatural. The blast that swells the breast of an enthusiast, is like the rushing of a mighty wind, which fills the whole man, and carries away part of his senses. It tumifies his conceit, and leaves a fracture in his understanding. It is a contagious malady that preys on the spirits. 'Tis a spiritual intermitting fever, which, in the paroxysms, is generally known by heavings and sobbings, by vociferations and howlings, by shakings and contortions, by broken sentences and nonsense. No remedy can asswage or mollify it in the fit; but between the fits, a cool and temperate regimen with phlebotomy, may be of service, not only on account of the repletion of the spirits, but as being most consonantaneous to their sanguinary doctrine, that without shedding blood, there is no remission. Evacuants which eject the redundancy of bile and atrabilis, seem proper to be administered, that the ebullition of the blood may be tempered; carminatives too should be exhibited for the ejection of the flatus, by crepitation and detonation, that the eruptions of the spirit may be allayed, and a free diuresis procured, that the red hot thunder bolts of the conceited wrath of revenging deities may be quenched

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by the diuretic flood. When a smoothness of the brow, risibility, and civil mirth appear, they are great and good signs of approaching health, of a sound mind, and reason returning.

But the true light keeps men in their true senses, being opposite to every dark error and false way. That is a true light which gives us the light of truth, and by which truth is clearly seen ; therefore those doctrines that we cannot certainly know whether they are true or false, are not the teachings of this true, this natural, this divine light ; but are human, are doubtful, and may be fallacious ; and therefore ought to be doubtfully received, and carefully examined. God is the God of truth, and as God's word is all truth, so all truth is God's word, whether it be divine, mathematical, or mechanical ; for by all these the world is constituted, and the one light of reason informs mankind of them all, and instructs him in all.

This light, this everlasting light, this everlasting universal light, the light of all creatures, the light of man, the noblest of them all, so made or distinguished only by possessing the greatest measure of it, of all the creatures on this globe ; this eternal and unfading light reveals

veals to man all that is necessary for man to know, directs him all that is proper for him to say or do. Tho' it be in man, but as the light of the moon or planets to the sun, borrowed, limited, and subjected to various aspects of inconstant duration ; and notwithstanding its rays in man are faint, and often clouded, 'tis the best light man has ; therefore let us make the best use of it, and so doing we shall find it sufficient to guide us thro' the world, and lead us to all the felicity we are made to enjoy ; for let it be as cloudy and as obscure as possible, God who gives to man his capacities by measure, can as a just being, require no more of any man, than the best improvements and use he can make such measure of it, as he has given him in his circumstances. For this light, respecting its own nature from God, like the sun, shines on all alike, but respecting the objects it shines upon, it is not seen alike by all. As some eyes are better than others, so some minds have clearer perceptions than others. This is according to the infinite variety of things ; and what but the all-ruling power has made us to differ in our abilities ? Some indeed make a better use of theirs than others ; in these their abilities grow strong, and their light is clear ; in others, they are weak and faint. As

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there is a difference in the capacities of receiving the light, which is not criminal, so there is in the improving by it, which is not always criminal neither; for the want of proper opportunities and circumstances, prevent many from growing in the knowledge of truth who have a sincere love to it. By carefully regarding this light, the natural light of good nature, and a good understanding, men grow wiser and better; but by carelessly disregarding it, men become more foolish and brutish, credulous and superstitious. All that are wise and virtuous, are led by it; for this is the spirit of God in man, and *As many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the children of God.* But the wicked love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

*Grant, Father, that this heavenly light of thine,  
In every breast may glow, in every mind may shine.*

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## LECTURE XII.

### *Of Spiritual Understanding.*

**T**HAT ye may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, was the prayer of Paul for the Colossians,

Colossians, (C. i. v. 9.) and mine for you who are my auditors. Understanding is of the most spiritual nature, and is indeed the perfection of it; at least it appears so to us. Spiritual is here joined to the word understanding, to shew that it is restricted, or limited to divine subjects, such as wisdom to know the will of God.

I have taken this text to shew you what spiritual understanding is; to have spiritual understanding, is to have light in the mind, or an intelligent spirit. And as there can be none of this without reason, it is reason's taper lighted up by God's light, which is no other than man's reason, enlightened by the nature of things. This light is every where, where God is; and the evidence of it is every where, where nature is, or where the laws of material beings are manifest; And they who believe not in this light, but in the false lights that men have set up, in opposition to it, are verily and indeed the true infidels.

If this be the truth of the case, and that it is, all cases speak it, then he who is taught by nature and reason, is taught of God; he has a spiritual teacher; he and he only, has spiritual understanding.

Knowledge and wisdom, truth and goodness, are spiritual natures ; therefore all virtuous dispositions and actions proceed from these, and are spiritual ; and whatever proceeds from contrary natures, as ignorance, folly and falsehood, are called carnal, being the fruits of carnality ; so, 1 Cor. iii. v. 1. 2. 3. *And I brethren could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto, ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able; For ye are yet carnal—For whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? &c.*

Unto them that are without, all divine doctrines are parables ; who are those that are without, but the outwardly religious, whose understanding is carnal, not spiritual, who look for things in an outward manner, which they ought to look for in themselves. Those who desire the knowledge of truth, and seek for it, are only worthy to find it. Parables whet the appetites of seekers, and leave the careless and conceited in ignorance. It is evident to all men of thought and reflexion, that the doctrines of the gospel, being delivered in parables and allegories, in metaphors and symbols, the true sense lies hid,

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its recondite treasure is concealed under enigmatical expressions, and can only be the subject of a spiritual understanding.

The sacred scriptures being parabolically delivered, it has given rise to abundance of different sects who were led by the letter, and had not a clear rational understanding, which is the true guide of men. What cannot be supported by reason, by reason may be destroyed. What doctrines are not rational, are enthusiastical or dogmatical, there is no mean between them; they are directly opposite. Those principles, notions, doctrines and creeds, which are not rational, will ever remain doubtful and disputable; and consequently ever more create sects, and divide men into factions.

Because carnal minds are not able to bear, or cannot endure the plain truth, therefore it is delivered to men in parables, metaphors, and allegories: therefore it is that when plain truth is delivered, stript of all covering, carnal minds shew by the reproach of their tongues, the malignity of their hearts; but those who know no better, and whose understandings cannot stretch to behold truth in her naked lustre, are babes, whose eyes, being nursed in darkness, are not strong

strong enough to bear the resplendent light of truth. This weakness, if they wait with patience, and seek with sincerity, will be overcome. But those who for interest, or to gain the applause of the prejudiced and ignorant, knowingly oppose the truth, are men whose consciences are prostituted to carnal purposes ; trampling on truth and sincerity. As truth is one, so is the way that leads to her habitation. And all other ways but that one, lead men into the wilderness of error, wherein are the dens of faction, division, bigotry, blindness, animosity, reproach, slander, persecution, all the infernal demons, and all the brood of carnality. But in the habitation of truth there is unity, freedom, light, love, friendship, humanity, true philosophy, pure, divinity, and all the happy offspring of spirituality. Here is the revelation of God ; this is the kingdom of heaven. They only know and enjoy this, who have spiritual understanding.

The revelations of God are certainly more knowable, more certain and intelligible, than the revelations of men ; whatever is God's revelation, man knows to be certain truth, and it does not depend on any dubious testimony. Spiritual understanding, is conviction of the clearest kind, whatever

whatever therefore is not clearly understood, and not known to be an undoubted truth, is no revelation of God ; consequently what a man does not know to be his duty to believe or do, as a command from God, is not his duty to obey as such. I say that God's revelation conveys to us certainty and knowledge ; therefore it is not of things uncertain and unknown by tradition or report, for the traditions, reports and assertions of men, tho' they may be true, are no revelation of God to me, until by undeniable evidence and convincing reason, I am fully satisfied, they must of necessity be so, and cannot possibly be otherwise ; therefore no man ought to be condemned for not believing aught, until God, by the evidence of nature, and light of reason, convinces him of the truth, with which, whatever does not agree, wants not only divine testimony to confirm it, but has divine testimony declaring against it, by not agreeing with it. This is not like the bare declamation of men in vindicating a fashionable faith, but the display of that spiritual understanding which can bear the test of common sense, reason and argument, which doctrine I shall recapitulate in these words. What is the infallible revelation of God, men may infallibly know to be as infallibly true, as their own beings : Therefore ]

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whoever suffers himself to be imposed on, is not guided by God's revelation. Nothing is more true than that truth is the word of God, and God's word is known by his work. He speaks to our eyes and to our understandings, not by sounds, but sense. As nature is in God, so truth is in nature ; and we know more certainly that what we call the works of nature, are the offspring of God, or produced by him, than that any book in the world was written by his immediate direction ; therefore that should guide our sense in all things.

A spiritual understanding is the divine light of nature. In a divine light the divinity of Christ consisted, therefore it is called Christ, Christ being conceived to be the rational spirit, which is spiritual understanding ; christianity is altogether rational, but those who are without this divine sense, all things to these are parable, all is darkness, *whom the God of this world, the worldly things men idolize, has blinded*, 2 Cor. iv. v. 4. These are those who are without, that have only a Christ without, and are therefore without Christ. Christ without was but man, but Christ within, is God. The worshippers of this Christ have spiritual understanding. But the former are idolators, who run away with enthusiastical

thusiastical and false notions which operate on their passions not on their understandings.

Whatever God requires men to believe, must not only be plain and clear that he does require it, but it must be plainly and clearly such, as is necessary to direct man's understanding to see that the necessary consequences of believing it leads man to certain happiness. This doctrine dispels, as the sun does, the clouds which intercept its light, all the impositions of men, which they have sanctified in the name of God, time permits me to give you but one instance, but by this one, you may be able to apply the doctrine to any other.

The instance or example by way of trial is this: I ask seriously, what is the fall of man, and man's redemption from that fall by Jesus Christ, to us, considered as an action done outwardly, long ago, and without our knowledge, to which our wills neither acquiesced nor gain-said, and which our power could neither further nor prevent? What certainty can we possibly have, that these things are true? and if true, how does it tend to enlighten our understandings, direct our conduct, or improve our happiness to know it. If the first person commit-

ed a fault, and another has made amends for it, what is it to us? Are we not thereby put into the same condition as if nothing had ever been done? Does it concern us to know what was done before we were born, which we could not possibly have any hand in, any more than what will be done when we shall be dead and gone, or what is done in kingdoms remote from us, which we know nothing of? How can such things concern us? How can the not knowing them, make us unhappy? or the knowing them, contribute to our happiness, which every moment depends on the present state, and the consequence of that to us, not on the knowledge or belief of things past and unavoidable, and which could not by us be promoted or prevented?

I expect to be answered, that we are made acquainted with these past transactions, that we may know our fallen state in order to humble us, and that we may be thankful to God for our merciful deliverance by a redeemer.

I answer, that if this tale be true, and if to believe our wretched condition by nature, humbles us; it humbles also our opinion of deity, who contrived his work so ill; and finding the weakness of his work, not immediately to remedy

medy it; and when he attempted to do it, did it in so bad a manner, first by drowning mankind, and afterwards by making the just suffer for the unjust; and both to so bad a purpose, that things go on as ill as ever. This doctrine is of no use to improve men's understanding, to direct their conduct, nor to make them happy; and the absurdities that attend it, shew it to be no revelation of God. And it is absurd to thank God for a chimerical deliverance from a chimerical fall, the effect of ignorance and stupidity, and not piety.

It will be objected, that if Adam's fall concerns us not, why does the apostle Paul mention it. I answer such objectors, that he speaks of it only allegorically, and the moral of any fable or allegory is of concern to us; for this reason are facts allegorized. Know then, that St. Paul speaks of two natures or dispositions in man, the one carnal, the other spiritual. Thus the fall of man, is in the one nature, and his restoration in the other. So in 1 Cor. xv. 45. 48. *The first man Adam was made a living soul*, signifying a natural life; the last Adam a quickening spirit, signifying a spiritual life; so man lives first a natural or earthly life, before the spiritual or heavenly.

Hence learn, that all carnal or crude imaginations of things past or to come, not knowable, warrantable, nor probable by the present evidence of nature and human reason, are unworthy of credibility, and have no place in a spiritual understanding, in which the spirituality of the scriptures consist. To make the dark parts of scripture agree with the light, is the way to enlighten the whole. If scripture doctrines are parabolical, men cannot come at truth by the letter, but by the spirit of truth; and until that opens mens understandings, they cannot find truth in them, nor make truth of them, tho' men may be blown up and bloated with a false conceit of it.

Whatever is embraced by the understanding, agrees with the evidence of nature, which is the testimony God has given us of himself. His laws, which we call the laws of nature, are the foundation of all truth, and the unerring guide of human reason, because unchangeable: therefore whoever teaches or preaches, any doctrine contrary thereto, is a false teacher, either through ignorance, or knavery. If this be not God's light in man, God's light is something greater, or contrary to it. A light greater than reason, cannot be received by human powers, all such pretensions are evidently false; and

and a light contrary to reason, cannot be true ; because in all affairs that man can clearly exercise his reason on, it gives infallible proofs of its rectitude, beyond all other pretended lights in opposition to it. Whenever man's reason judges wrong, it proceeds from the want of sufficient and plain ground, to see clearly into the nature of the case, to form a right judgment of it, or the prejudices of men cloud their spiritual understandings.

And why is our belief of things urged, as if the very existence or truth of the things depended on the belief. It is indeed all the truth or existence that falsehood has, and without this deception takes place, the deceivers have no power nor influence, to avail themselves of mens good things, by their credulity ; or to acquire honour and profit, by espousing a predominant and fashionable opinion : For how can our belief or unbelief, alter the nature of things, either to ourselves or others ? But if the belief of a bigot makes him a persecutor, it is doing good to society, to persuade him to quit his faith and follow reason. When the belief of mysteries are required to conquer our reason, and confound our understandings, to introduce stupidity, slavery, and the support of knavery, it

it is the natural imposition of an unnatural faith, and therefore it is, that we endeavour to plow it up, that better seed may be sown. This is my answer to those who say, if you take away our christianity, what do you give us in the room? We would take away your carnal christianity and give you spiritual; for your faith, we would give you truth; for your superstitious piety, we would have you receive social virtues, and the light of reason for the darkness of tradition, that you may judge and act consistent with natural light, and see your own happiness to be united to, and inseparable from the happiness of others; not to idolize men, nor books, nor notions; but in your own minds, seek the knowledge of true judgment and right action, and you will find it in what enthrones reason and spiritual understanding; and in what dethrones all domineering passions, and exorbitant desires, reducing all extremes to a proper mean; and you will learn by the nature of the circumstances that call for action, and by motives to it the rule of right action, and nature of virtue.

It appears by what has been said, that the gospel is a spiritual mystery, therefore known only to those who have a spiritual understanding; not understood by the parabolical letter, which

which cannot give life and intelligence. Those who seek it here, seek the living among the dead. Christ is not here, he is risen, he is ascended. The letter is that flesh, wherein he is crucified. He was put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit; he is dead in the fleshly nature, but alive in the spiritual; and so are all who enter into the kingdom of the gospel, which is the kingdom of christ of heaven, and of God; and this *kingdom of heaven is within you*. Turn in therefore, and look for it, and there you may find it; but those who are without, see nothing but parables. May the good God give to all that hear me understanding eyes, and honest hearts, that you may find the kingdom of heaven is come unto you.

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### LECTURE XIII.

#### *Of the Word of God.*

THINGS are known by their qualities; by the nature of things, things are discoverable to the nature of man. What things are naturally good or evil, or tend to promote the one or the other, are by their nature known.

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The nature of divinity, must be of the nature of God which it comes from. It must carry conviction with it without human testimony. 'Tis self evident; itself displays itself.

As the reason and nature of things is the natural rule of man's conduct, so all scripture founded thereon, or agreeable thereto, either in the letter, or in its construction, as Mr. Bayle, says, "is more apparently true, more certainly clear, and consequently more infallible, than what skill in languages, grammatical criticisms, the judgment of the church, or any supernatural inspiration can afford; for all right interpretation of scripture, must be agreeable to principles universally received by the light of nature. Any scripture which insinuates an obligation to believe or do what reason and common sense condemn, is, to be esteemed false and erroneous," I add, tho' miracles on miracles be wrought to confirm it. Miracles cannot shew the nature of doctrines, because there is no connection between them; nor are they needful to confirm the character of a man of God; for if his life and doctrines be correspondent to the light of nature, that must declare it; but if contrary, nothing can; for no revelation of God can run counter to it.

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We never can be assured of any thing, but as it is agreeable to that primitive and universal light, infused by God into the minds of men, which makes a part of human nature. " This light (as Mr. Baile says) infallibly, and irresistibly obliges men to assent to evident truths, the moment they lend their attention to it."

The word of God is man's infallible rule and conductor in what we ought to believe and do, but where or what is that word? If what is called so by men, be not self evident, if it carry not its own conviction with it that it is so, then it requires proof.

If God has given me his word to be my guide, will he not tell me what his word is? If I take God's word on man's authority only, it wants that testimony which is necessary to confirm it to be God's word: And for want of this, I don't know that I obey God in making that word to be my guide, which men say is his; for I obey it on man's account, and put my faith in those that tell me so, not in God; for what is his word for certain, I know not, if I take God's word on the credit and authority of man.

Is the scripture which is called God's word, a light distinct from reason; if I put out the light of my reason, what light shall I then have? Or remove it from my reason, and what is my reason the less? To believe that any thing is the word of God, without reason, is confessing I have no reason to believe it. I will give credit to reasonable and probable things. Things that are not so, let *them* credit who please, they will find no bounds to their credulity, and may be slaves to every imposition of men that lay in wait to deceive.

The words of man, are no more the word of God, than the works of man are the works of God. Man reads God in his works. *The dictates of an enlightened understanding is the word of God in the soul of man.* Man's tradition is not God's word. The letter of the scripture which is written by man, man will corrupt, pervert and defile, but the word of God endureth for ever. It has in itself the power of an endless life, it is the life of the world, and in this is the light of man. Consequently the revelation or word of God, is not paper, written or printed, in a book; but written by the finger of God in tables of mens hearts; it is what the divine nature teaches, *comparing spiritual things with*

*with spiritual*, that is by reasoning. And those scriptures are given by the inspiration or teachings of this word, which contain rational and useful instruction.

What know we of any of the primitive presbyters, or their writings? We receive the latter on trust from the former, and the former on trust from what is related of them, of whom 'tis probable the relators know no more than we. Unless we judge by reason, we build as much on tradition as papists do. And if we judge by reason, we make reason our judge, and believe no more of tradition than what agrees with reason. And that's as much as we should do, if men were not made what they are by education, and had not that natural prejudice which sticks to it, which is hard with most, impossible with many, wholly to eradicate, they would question whether some writings were written by those whose names they bear, when 'tis certain some ancient sects charged others with corrupting the writings of their predecessors, and putting their names to books they never wrote? And it must be confessed that christianity itself has so often changed its complexion, that the christians of one age and country, have generally deemed others heretics. If

the writings we esteem, were written by those whose names they bear, have they received no alterations since? Can we be sure they are as true and uncorrupted, as unbiassed reason and common sense are? Or if these writings are pure and uncorrupted, can we more safely trust to them, whom we and our fathers never knew, than to our own reason and sincerity? And are their mysterious writings more to be confided in, than our own integrity and understanding?

'Tis a popish error to suppose the sense of the letter of the holy scriptures is the word of God. No, you may read the bible a thousand times over, and never know God's word, which none but he that is of God can read. For as Jesus declared to the Jews, that tho' he was sent of God, and *he who is sent of God, speaketh God's word*, yet tho' they heard him speak, they heard not God's word. John, viii. 47. *He that is of God, beareth God's word, ye therefore bear them not, because ye are not of God.* Mens literal understanding the bible, is oft times their delusion.

If scripture is to be explained by reason, it is not so plain as reason: It is reason then that enlightens us, not scripture; but reason is the rule

rule that directs our understandings. If reason is to be governed by scripture, then a text of scripture is of more force than reason, and reason must be silenced by it ; to reason then about scripture, is to confound ourselves ; if scripture is to rule our reason, reason is no judge of scripture ; you must take the scripture as it is, not presume to explain it by reason, for that is giving the preference to reason. If scripture say one thing and reason another ; must you follow reason or scripture, as when it says, *take eat, this is my body, and this is my blood, drink ye all of it. If a man come unto me, and HATE not his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life, he cannot be my disciple.* And many other expressions, which if you explain by reason, you make that your guide, not scripture.

But if the true sense of sacred scripture is the word of God, and men err because they do not understand it, it is not the word of God to them that understand it not.

The scriptures without reason are not convincing. It is an authority without light, which it receives from human laws and customs.

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The scriptures were written by men, and by men have been conveyed to us ; nor is it possible for us to know that God was more concerned about them, than about any other writings of men, as they have no peculiar evidence in themselves to prove it.

The word of God is in these scriptures called God himself. *In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.* The word of God is God's law, his law is his nature, and the nature of God is God himself. Now the scripture is not God, therefore not his word. *The word of God* in these scriptures is said to be, Heb. iv. 12. *quick, that is living, and powerful, sharper than a two edged sword, a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart;* It is the spirit of enquiry and sound understanding, but the scriptures are dead, weak and blunt, not improving our reason, unless by employing it as other writings do, which are hard to understand and make rational sense of ; and so far is it from being able to discern the thoughts and intents of mens hearts, that mens hearts and thoughts find it difficult in many cases to discern its intent and meaning : *The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life,* says Paul. It is the spirit, not the letter, the understanding mind, not the book, that is God's word. I

I allow that to be the word of God which the scripture says is ; but it does not say itself is the word of God, and *if it bears witness of itself, it's witness is not true* ; John v. 31. Jesus Christ said so of himself, and surely the scripture is not greater than he.

We should not confound things of a contrary nature, and put one for the other ; the letter is not the spirit, nor is the spirit the letter, man's word is not God's, nor God's word, man's ; the one is dark and deadly ; the other is light and lively. *Wo be unto them who put darkness for light, and light for darkness.*

The scriptures cannot be proved to be the word of God, from the authority of men, who-ever they are or have been ; for that is only proving such men say it is, and the further men go back to prove this, is but an attempt to lead us more out of sight, and to fix our faith or credit on persons more unknown ; therefore their authority is less than one who is known, whose wisdom and veracity can be depended on ; for we ought to have satisfactory proof of their wisdom and varacity, whose bare word we take for proof, or 'tis only saying instead of proving, and giving us affirmation

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for demonstration. What then must we do with our bibles? Must we give up our bibles? Shall we burn our bibles? No, keep them in the name of God, but do not put the name of God upon them. Do not idolize them. Do not make a paper God of them. Learn to know that what veneration they deserve, is to be judged by the nature of their contents, and give them their deserts; give unto God the things that are God's, and to man the things that are man's. Its intrinsic nature is its only true, right, and reasonable proof, whereby it will appear, that as the subjects it treats on are various, and variously handled, in such manner and degree, the parts are to be variously esteemed, or regarded. We can only have rational and natural proof; we should read it with a mind as unprejudiced as we do other books, and judge of the contents as freely, and take the liberty to rationalise what is dark and mysterious, and reject what is literally absurd and erroneous, and spiritualise it into sense; for as God is a spirit, his word is spiritual.

The use men make of the scriptures, which they call the word of God, is sufficient to make us disbelieve them, for they use them to subject our reason and understandings implicitly

citily to believe it to be what they term it ; and that it teaches what they say it does ; as if it was the nature of the word of God, to enslave the reason of man ; for what more enslaves the mind than to be required to believe without evidence, without reasonable proof, without conviction, without liberty to think and judge for ourselves.

When spiritual truths are our food, and our delight, then it is our meat and drink, as it was Christ's, to do the will of him that sent us into the world, as God sent him into the world on the same errand.

What hinders men from receiving the truth, but fondness for nursed-up opinions, and imbibed prejudices ; those are the things they must abdicate ; those are the relations they must hate for Christ's sake, that is, for the truth's sake, for truth is God's word, and God's word is Christ spiritually, and no other Christ will do us any good. Mark it well, and bear it in mind, Truth does the office of the Holy Ghost. It sanctifies. *Sanctify them* (said Jesus to God, of his disciples) *tbro' thy truth, thy word is truth*, John xvii. 19. It denotes the true worship of God, for he his worshipped only in spirit and in truth.

Truth does the office Christ is said to do, for truth is man's saviour and deliverer, for it saves and delivers men from the delusion of error and the captivity of sin, that land of Egypt, and house of bondage : truth is the mediator between God and man ; it brings man to the knowledge of God, and thus brings God to man : the reception of truth atones for past errors, for it brings man to repentance and amendment of life, and thus makes the reconciliation between God and man. Thus the true Chirist in a spiritual sense is spiritual truth ; for the flesh profiteth nothing, no, not the flesh of Christ. *The words that I speak unto you, said he, they are spirit, and they are life ; they are of a spiritual and living nature,*

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